United Nations A/S-27/PV.3

General Assembly

Twenty-seventh special session

Official Records

3rd meeting
Thursday, 9 May 2002, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

Draft resolution (A/S-27/L.1)

The President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, President of the Republic of Zambia.

President Mwanawasa: May I, on behalf of my delegation, congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this special session. My delegation is pleased to be part of this very important special session for children. May I, on behalf of the people of Zambia, my Government and the children of Africa, extend best wishes to all participants.

As we assemble in this great city of New York to deliberate on the future of the world's children, let us remember the irony that makes this meeting particularly challenging. We know too well after the dreadful events of 11 September 2001 that tomorrow can be guaranteed for the world's children only if we fight emerging threats to peace and personal security for all today. A terrorist act in one country is a terrorist crime against all.

People of New York and the United States of America, may your wounds heal fast, and may ground zero remain, for all humanity, a symbol, not of our vulnerability but of the unshakeable foundation of mother Earth. Collectively, and on behalf of all the world's children, we must pledge that we will make the world safe from all forms of terrorism: physical, social, cultural, environmental or economic.

Turbulence is a characteristic of today's world, and yet the commitments we made to our children in 1990 when Zambia joined the rest of the States Members of the United Nations at the World Summit for Children remain a moral call for action. It is in our best interest to come back to New York to take stock of the extent to which the Declaration and Plan of Action for children have inspired us to take concrete steps on behalf of our children.

Like many other countries, Zambia, thanks to the technical support of the United Nations Children's Fund, has a national programme of action for children that creates alliances for children and empowers communities and families. Maternal and child health, basic education, food security and nutrition, water and sanitation and family welfare programmes of action have been developed. I wish to report on some of these.

In seeking for the objective of education for all, we have introduced free education for all children in

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

02-37519 (E)

grades one to seven. We are promoting girl child education including a re-entry programme for young mothers. Bursary schemes have been introduced for orphans and vulnerable children throughout Zambia. Through sector-wide approaches to child health, we have sought creative ways to guarantee the welfare of children. Vitamin A supplementation in food has been successfully implemented, in addition to broad-based programmes aimed at the eradication of immunizable diseases.

However, the record of positive achievements in addressing the problem of providing services to vulnerable children has been tempted by the grim realities of the burdensome shackles of poverty that Zambia, like many other African countries, faces.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has continued to rob us not only of the hopeful smiles of our children, but the nurturing presence of their parents. Current estimates are that 44 per cent of households in Zambia accommodate orphans, while 13 per cent of children below 18 years are orphans.

The ghastly shadows of poverty and HIV/AIDS are darkened even further for Africa's children at a time when the continent is mired in civil conflicts and wars resulting in an ocean of refugees, the greater number of whom are children and women.

Zambia is a plateau of peace and consequently a home to many refugees fleeing war and basic want. we appeal to the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations the world over to help us share this burden. help us look after refugees: children and their. parents.

The rising hopes of the new millennium and the renaissance of African civilization have rekindled hope for our countries and our children. African Union and the Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development are our statement that Africa's children must be given a future. Humanity has a common fate, and I call on the world community to stand by us. We have committed to bequeath to our children the opportunity to grow up with confidence dignity, with the promise of a feature of prosperity and abundance.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Dame Calliopa Pearlette Louisy, Governor-General of Saint Lucia.

Dame Calliopa Pearlette Louisy: Saint Lucia joins the rest of the members of this august body in applauding this decision to give special attention in these turbulent times to the children of the world, the future of humanity. It was the English poet, William Wordsworth, who penned the enigmatic line "The Child is father of the man" expressing his conviction that it is the world in which we invite our children to live that is responsible for the under-realization of their potential. The calling to account of world leaders which this special Assembly represents is therefore not only most timely, but absolutely necessary for the sustainability and viability of our world.

It could be that we are so pre-occupied with securing or increasing our market share in the international marketplace in the now, that we lose sight of the players, today's children, who in the future would be expected to manage whatever gains we will have made. Or it could be that we believe that we know what is best for them, having gone down that road before. Thus, unless we are forced into dealing with a crisis, we provide so few opportunities for them to speak for themselves and thus to guide the policy decisions taken on their behalf.

That is why Saint Lucia applauds once again the initiators of the Global Movement for Children and the work done by the Preparatory Committee under the proven and capable leadership of Ambassador Patricia Durrant. It is our fervent hope that this initiative will serve as the main vehicle that will drive us, as policy makers and social planners, to place children's issues and concerns at the heart of our nations' development agendas.

In the decade under review, Saint Lucia has made significant progress in the areas of health, education and legislative reform, and in care and protection planning to advance the promotion of children's rights. These have been outlined in our end-of-decade assessment report.

However, in preparation for this international Assembly session, Saint Lucia convened a children's forum that sought to canvass the feelings, ideas, worries, hopes and dreams that participants wanted to be conveyed to the members of the international community. Time does not permit me to present them all, but their message was clear. The issue that was raised most consistently by all age groups participating was their perception that they were not sufficiently loved or adequately cared for by adults in society.

Indeed, their cry, or their plea, is borne out by chilling statistics that show that the incidence of physical and sexual abuse, neglect and abandonment of children in Saint Lucia has quadrupled over the course of the past five years. That has been attributed to the migration of mothers, the contraction of support from the extended family, early adolescent pregnancy and unemployment. But their comments were a telling indictment of family and social structures, which, to their minds, have failed to discharge their moral, social and civic responsibility towards them.

Also high on their list of concerns was the issue of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, there is cause for concern, as 14 per cent of the cases recorded in Saint Lucia are children under the age of 20; 8 per cent are paediatric cases in the 1- to 5-year-old age group; and 92 per cent of adolescent cases are girls between the ages of 15 and 19. Our children, therefore, called for programmatic interventions to reduce the spread of the disease and to eliminate discrimination against infected persons.

The children of Saint Lucia have also called for the creation of spaces of their own: recreational centres, a children's hospital, foster homes, counselling centres and children's resource centres. With characteristic generosity, they have also made a plea for help for their parents in the area of parenting. Indeed, their concerns are consistent with the goal of this Assembly session: the creation of a world in which they can enjoy their childhood — a time of play and learning in which they are loved, respected and cherished, and in which they can develop in peace, health and dignity.

Saint Lucia, therefore, looks to the continued support of the international community in maintaining — even in these difficult times — an enabling environment in which it can access the financial resources and the technical assistance needed to answer the legitimate call of its children for a more secure and less stressful environment. With so much at stake, immediate returns on that type of investment should not be the deciding factor.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Cheikh El Avia Ould Mohamed Khouna, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Mohamed Khouna (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a great honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Mr. Maaouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, on the occasion of this special session on children. I should like to express heartfelt congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Han Seung-soo, Foreign Minister of the friendly Republic of Korea, President of the Assembly at this session. I am sure that his experience and wisdom will be the best guarantee for the success of our work. I should also like to express our great esteem for the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his constant efforts to strengthen the role of the Organization and to enable it to carry out its missions in so many fields.

The United Nations has always devoted special attention to the problems of children. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1990 World Summit for Children were high points, and they marked a historic turning point in the way we address the problems of children. We commend the United Nations Children's Fund for the remarkable role it has played and for the actions and initiatives it has undertaken in favour of children.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, under the wise guidance of President Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, is working to lay the foundations of sustainable development in which men and women are the focus of our actions to expand economic, political, social and environmental protections. As our President has stated, we are working tirelessly to create equitable conditions conducive to the building of a society where equal opportunities exist for everyone and where creative genius of mankind is given free rein and is our central focus. In an atmosphere of security, stability and the rule of law, steady growth and basic services are to be found throughout the country. As a result, we have reduced poverty and have established conditions favourable to the development of our entire society, including its most vulnerable sector — children.

Mauritania was one of the first States to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In order to ensure its implementation, we have adopted a national plan to ensure the survival and safety of children and to protect their rights. We have organized strong campaigns to raise public awareness with regard to children's problems and special needs.

At the institutional level, a Secretariat of State for the Status of Women formulates and implements national policies for the promotion of children and the family. Women are given priority in my Government's

development policies. As a result, they have participated actively in our political, social and economic life and play their rightful role in national development efforts. In order to strengthen these efforts, we have established national institutions for the advancement of children, including the National Council for Children, the Parliamentary Children's Group and the Women's Association for the Defence of Children's Rights.

Children have also been a necessary focus of our legal and legislative institutions. The labour code has been revised to include better protection for children. Our country ratified the International Labour Organization Convention against the worst forms of child labour, and we have defined the minimum age at which children may work. We have promulgated the Personal Status Code, which defines clearly the rights and duties that guarantee the stability of the family, the future of children and the development of society. The Code will undoubtedly have a positive effect by strengthening family cohesion and protecting children. We are also devising a penal code for minors.

Providing basic educational and health services is one of the pillars of our national policies. We are convinced that the promotion of human resources is the determining factor in the campaign for development.

Furthermore, with the aim of providing a better future for coming generations, we have put in place compulsory basic schooling ensuring universal education and have established health programmes to protect mothers and children and to combat childhood diseases. Additionally, nutritional programmes have been created to improve the health of mothers and children.

Ambitious policies implemented in several areas have led to appreciable improvements in indicators of sustainable human development. Also, school enrolment rates have increased, health service coverage has been expanded, essential needs for potable water have been met, and mortality rates for children and pregnant women have been significantly reduced.

The achievements of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, under the wise leadership of the President of the Republic, Mr. Maaouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, are a reflection of my country's great efforts to improve our people's living standards despite our modest resources and the magnitude of the challenges. Because the problems of children constitute one of the greatest concerns and priorities of all States and all peoples, it is our duty to work to strengthen solidarity and cooperation to ensure a better future for coming generations.

Finally, I wish to reiterate the commitment of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania to the realization of the noble ideals of the United Nations for a world free of illness, famine, war and underdevelopment, a world in which children's health, development and the fulfilment of their potential will be ensured.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Al Hadji Yahya Jammeh, President of the Republic of the Gambia.

President Jammeh: On behalf of the children of the Gambia and on my own account, I would like to express our appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for the able manner in which he has presided over our deliberations. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his very comprehensive report, "We the Children", and once again to congratulate him on his re-election to his high office.

Ten years ago, world leaders gathered here in New York for an unprecedented summit to exchange ideas on issues that affect the well-being of our children. The outcome of that gathering was a World Declaration and Plan of Action in which we committed ourselves to giving the children of the world a better future. We agreed on an ambitious agenda for children, addressing issues such as their survival, health, nutrition, education and protection.

Today we are gathered to review progress made in the decade since the World Summit for Children. Since the Summit, the wide-ranging and world-wide preparatory process, including the "Say yes for children" campaign, gained momentum and culminated in this special session. This historic landmark heralds the advent of an era of reinvigorated international advocacy for the well-being of the world's children. As a result of political action and commitment at the highest level, the world has witnessed the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely-proclaimed human rights instrument in the history of our times. Those efforts would not have been possible without the collaborative assistance and partnership of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). I must therefore commend UNICEF, through its Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, and her team, for the role they played in the

process leading to this special session. Of course, special thanks also go to Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Durrant who, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, did a marvellous job.

We are gathered here to create a world for children. Our fellow speakers have put much emphasis on disease and poverty. I wonder how many children watching us here have confidence in what we are saying. The problems of the world's children, and the problems of humanity are many-faceted.

Children's biggest problems are really politicians and our politics, hated, racism and greed. We all agree that war has killed more children than any epidemic. War has created untold suffering for the children of the world. I have never seen a refugee camp set up because of an epidemic. We political leaders sense the advent of humanitarian politics. Our political philosophies, our greed and our insatiable appetite to dominate others have created untold misery for humanity. Today, we are concerned at the rise of racism in parts of the developed world, where today racism and hate are a platform for those ambitious about gaining political leadership. If we love children and want to create a better future for the world, we, the leaders, must commit ourselves here to ending war, the greatest cause of children's suffering.

Mr. President, I too am a President, but I do not envy your position. The children look to you with hope. The United Nations is the last hope of humanity. But if political leaders can defy United Nations resolutions, get away with it and create more suffering for humanity, we need to go beyond saying yes to children. Saying yes to children does not mean anything as long as we do not say yes to humanity. We should replace hate with love in order to be able to create a better world for children.

Greed has caused the exploitation that most leaders have been talking about: the exploitation of children. We have seen how the advent of HIV/AIDS in Africa and elsewhere has created a new market for multinationals to make profits.

Humanity has lost sight of its most important value: to make this world a world fit for humanity. It will not matter what resolutions we adopt here, as long as we political leaders are bent on imposing our will on other parts of the world and continue to believe that military might is a source of greatness for humanity.

No matter what we say here, the children of the world will still live in poverty and destitution. What can we say here? We should say no to war, no to racism and hate, and no to greed. Human beings' hearts are filled not with love but with greed, materialism and an insatiable appetite for wealth.

Other parts of the world are so rich that children can eat their fill of ice cream. In other parts of the world, a plane flying overhead attracts the eyes of the hungry, who are hoping for the rare sight of a relief flight dropping food for them to eat.

We, the political leaders, are the greatest enemies of the children. If we love children, we should issue a declaration against war, hate, racism and greed. It is all a question of politics. Only then will we be able to resolve the problem of Palestine, and only then will we be able to make this world a better place for humankind.

We must put an end to war, exploitation and our insatiable appetite for wealth. We have seen people spend $30 million just to go to space to be a tourist, while millions of children are dying on a daily basis, not because of AIDS or malaria but because they are hungry. If we commit ourselves to replace materialism in our hearts with the love of humanity, that is the most effective way of saying "yes" for the children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Lamine Sidimé, Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea.

Mr. Sidimé (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Guinea, which I have the honour to head, is pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over the work of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children.

I should like to take this opportunity to convey to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, a message of support and encouragement from General Lansana Conté, the President of the Republic of Guinea, for the tireless efforts he has been making at the head of our Organization in order to promote and implement its lofty ideals.

I should like to express our appreciation to the Preparatory Committee of this session, and in particular to its Chairperson, Miss Patricia Durrant, and to the other members of the Bureau, who have spared no effort in ensuring the successful holding of these meetings.

I wish also to thank Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and her entire team for the outstanding manner in which they are carrying out the work of the Secretariat.

We endorse the statement made by Mrs. Mubarak, the First Lady of Egypt, regarding the African common position on children — the outcome of the Pan-African Forum on the Future of Children, held in Cairo from 28 to 31 May 2001. The declaration and plan of action adopted at the Forum clearly express the common African position and represent a meaningful contribution on the part of Africa to this session.

What future awaits our children? What responsibilities should we shoulder with respect to them? We adults today were children yesterday, and the children of today will become the adults of tomorrow.

Determined to find adequate solutions to these questions, world leaders met here in New York in 1990 to discuss our various responsibilities to children — the future of humankind. Indeed, the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children for the 1990s — the outcome document of the World Summit for Children — clearly sets out our individual and collective responsibilities.

During the past decade, progress has been made with regard to the well-being of children. However, the results of the efforts of the international community have been mixed. The report of the Secretary-General entitled "We the children" describes in many respects the progress that has been made, the challenges that must be met and the future commitments of all stakeholders in the international community in the context of the effective implementation of the Summit Plan of Action.

Children and women, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, are, regrettably, still vulnerable and still suffering from the combined effects of poverty, the economic crisis, external debt, armed conflicts, the spread of violence, the continuing HIV/AIDS pandemic, and so on. These factors have a negative impact on development programmes, particularly those aimed at children. This requires an ongoing commitment on the part of the international community in order for possible solutions to be contemplated.

In this respect, the holding of this session attests to the renewed importance that the international community attaches to the rights of children.

My country, the Republic of Guinea, pursuant to the decisions taken at the World Summit, in 1992 adopted a national plan for children. Many public and para-public structures were established, which have significantly contributed to the promulgation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the revitalization of health and education programmes, in particular those aimed at educating young girls and at strengthening community participation.

These achievements were made possible by the political determination of the Government of Guinea and the involvement of non-governmental organizations, civil society and grass-roots organizations. The contribution of bilateral and multilateral partners has also been important. We wish to express our gratitude to them and to ask them to redouble their efforts to implement their development programmes for children.

However, we cannot but note that the instability and insecurity prevailing in neighbouring countries has had a considerable impact on the Government's efforts for children, who are the primary victims of this phenomenon.

My delegation is convinced that any genuine development entails investing in the education of children and respecting their basic rights. This session must be an opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the actions that have been agreed on in the past, to draw lessons from this and to envisage the specific actions that need to be taken.

We have the historic duty to bequeath to future generations a world of justice, security, peace and progress. The commitments that will be entered into at the end of this session must reflect the challenges that need to be met and reaffirm the common determination of all parties to take all necessary measures to ensure their fulfilment.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius.

Sir Anerood Jugnauth (Mauritius): As we speak here today, innocent children in different parts of the globe, especially the Middle East and Africa, are

falling victim to the atrocities of conflict — not because of the lack of mechanisms to protect children, but rather because of the lack of political will to translate into action the provisions of the relevant international and regional conventions for the protection of children.

While we acknowledge the fact that, with the adoption of the Plan of Action at the World Summit for Children in 1990, the life of our children has significantly improved, it is obvious that more needs to be done to ensure a better future for them.

In his speech yesterday, the Secretary-General enumerated the rights that children have and which they should be allowed to enjoy freely. Every effort must be made by all of us to ensure that children get and enjoy those rights — especially those children who continue to be the most vulnerable victims of worsening economic conditions in the developing world.

Diseases such as HIV/AIDS are causing despair among the younger generation, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa. Prompt action is required to reverse these trends. We are all aware of the legitimate needs and aspirations of our children and of what makes them happy in life. These should guide us as we work towards a world fit for them. Let our meeting here today be an opportunity to make a common and solemn pledge to make the world a better place for our children. Let us learn from one another's experience of how we have implemented policies to promote the welfare of children.

In anticipation of this special session of the General Assembly, we in Mauritius successfully launched the "Say yes for children" campaign. Various stakeholders, Government institutions, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and parents themselves participated in the successful campaign. More than 230,000 people, including children and adolescents — 22 per cent of the Mauritian population — actually participated in the vote to determine priorities for the children of our country. The vote identified three top priorities: to educate every child; to care for every child; and to stop harming and exploiting children.

As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Mauritius has undertaken necessary measures to incorporate into its legislation many of the provisions contained in the Convention, in the best interests of its children. In 1994 enacted the Child Protection Act to ensure the protection of children from all forms of abuse and exploitation. Mauritius has introduced amendments to more than 24 pieces of legislation so as to include severe penalties in all cases of exploitation and abuse. It has ratified and translated into its domestic legislation the International Labour Organization Convention on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

My Government has created a special portfolio in the Ministry of Women's Rights and Family Welfare to cater for the specific requirements of child development. The right to education being fundamental, our children enjoy free access to education at all levels. Since 1995, we have made primary education compulsory.

Public health-care services are free and easily accessible through an extensive network of hospitals, health-care centres and community health centres, which provide comprehensive health care, including prenatal and early child development services. Mauritius provides free immunization services for a wide range of infant diseases, as recommended by the World Health Organization.

As a responsible Government, we have taken effective steps to contain the negative side effects of rapid socio-economic development on children without putting in jeopardy our strategy for economic progress. To encourage increased access to information and communications technology, we have launched a major information technology project in schools.

Conscious of the negative impact of the Internet culture on our children and youth, we are taking bold steps to shield our children from harmful exposure. The participation of non-governmental organizations is essential to ensure the successful implementation of a comprehensive programme for the benefit of children. In Mauritius the Government works very closely in this regard with grass-roots organizations, as well as with international bodies and agencies.

Our thanks also go to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its valuable support for projects aimed at improving the welfare of children in general. UNICEF has maintained an active presence in Mauritius over the past three decades. Its expertise has been crucial in implementing Government programmes targeted at children. We intend to explore new avenues of cooperation between that United Nations agency and

Mauritius, once we no longer qualify for direct assistance in view of our per capita income.

In a statement issued on Tuesday (S/PRST/2002/12), the Security Council expressed concern at the grave impact of armed conflict in all its aspects on children. In that statement, the Council stressed the need for global action in the protection of children. My delegation welcomes that initiative, and we will work hard in the Security Council to ensure its effective implementation.

My delegation looks forward to the adoption of the draft declaration. It is the hope of my delegation that each one of us will place the interests of children above all other considerations and contribute to the adoption of a plan of action which will be practical, realistic and implementable. Let the plan of action be a guide to our future course of action to promote the well-being of our children and to protect their future.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Osmunakun Ibraimov, Vice-President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr. Ibraimov (Kyrgyz Republic) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I should like, on behalf of the delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic, wholeheartedly to congratulate the President of the General Assembly at this special session on children and to wish him every success in discharging his honourable and responsible mission.

A little more than 10 years ago, we held the historic 1990 World Summit for Children, at which world leaders met to discuss their obligations to children and the prospects for the future. Since then, many changes have occurred in the world. It has been a genuinely memorable decade, as the first President of independent Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, has said, in particular for the newly independent countries of the post-Soviet space. As soon as we became full Members of the United Nations we assumed the high responsibility of improving the lives of children. This was quite natural for such newly emerged States as my country, the Kyrgyz Republic.

In my country, we fully realized, as we continue to do, that the future of the country and the very basis of independent existence depend on how we educate our children. I wish to refer to my country's basic achievements in seeking over the past decade to fulfil the tasks outlined by the World Summit for Children.

We have, in particular, significantly reduced infantile and maternal mortality rates. Immunization levels have risen to 98 per cent. We have fully eradicated polio and eliminated tetanus in newborn children, and enjoy full access to primary and middle education. All pregnant women now have full access to pre-natal and qualified post-natal care.

In 1994, our country ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That was the starting point for the creation of legislation to protect the interests of children. My Government abides by all its obligations to provide accounts on our compliance with the Convention. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan has ratified six basic international human rights treaties and submitted in a timely fashion the appropriate country reports. Our country has prepared a report on its compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it has sent to the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. At the same time, state procedures are being implemented to accede to the Optional Protocols on the protection of the interests and rights of children. Those instruments will soon be ratified by our Parliament. In June 2000, the Government of Kyrgyzstan established a committee to draft a national programme to be entitled "New Generation".

Our efforts received further impetus from the Global Movement for Children, an initiative of the United Nations Children's Fund. The entire Republic participated in national events in the context of the Movement. President Akayev was the first to join the "Say Yes for Children" campaign and signed the first voting ballot.

Article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is of particular importance to us because it guarantees protection for children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and from their use in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances. In the context of that campaign, in 2002 my country signed the Youth Charter for a Twenty-First Century Free of Drugs. We are pursuing and further elaborating work on various measures to combat this scourge, because we believe that this campaign should be a long-term endeavour.

During our work at this special session in New York, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, will be receiving guests and participants in a parallel special session for children and young people from the Central Asian region. From 7 to 10 May, children from five

Republics of our region will discuss the same kinds of problems and establish cooperation to activate the youth movement.

In this respect, I note the tremendous role played by the country's principal children's fund, the International Charitable Fund, and the participation of the President of Kyrgyzstan in addressing children's issues. Thanks to the Fund's efforts, we are building a children's rehabilitation centre on the shore of Lake Ysyk-Köl and have established some excellent children's villages, the first of which has been in function since 1999 in Bishkek, with financial support from SOS Kinderdof International. We have established and successfully launched a centre for child protection, a centre for homeless children, a centre for social adaptation, and many others.

With regard to legislation, a number of laws have been drafted and adopted. In 1997, we endorsed a law on education; in 1998, we adopted a law on the foundations for state youth policy, a law on guardianship and trusteeship, a law on disabilities, a law on mentorship and many others. In 1997, a national strategy was drafted for sustainable human development, within which we elaborated a number of national programmes on public health, gender development, youth policies, education, employment and poverty, all of which seek to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Kyrgyzstan.

This special session on children is extremely timely and strategically important. It gives us an opportunity to consolidate our efforts to chart further ways of creating the further possible future for our children.

I am pleased to note that the policy of our Government since independence has been consonant with our national traditions and the values of our people, all in the context of the global agenda. Despite economic difficulties, we are prepared to assume responsibility and to take specific action to improve the situation of children and further to implement their rights. A global partnership is now at work to achieve these goals.

In conclusion, I wish once again to express the gratitude of the Kyrgyz delegation to the organizers of this special session, the importance of which to the implementation of the rights of children, our common future, is hard to overestimate. At stake are the lives and dignity of those who will live in the twenty-first century and whose hands hold the fate of the world. On behalf of my delegation, I assure the General Assembly that the Government of Kyrgyzstan will pursue its efforts to implement the Declaration and Plan of Action and the provisions of the outcome document of this special session.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Luis Hierro López, Vice-President of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay.

Mr. Hierro López (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I must pay tribute to the tremendous organizational and progressive efforts that the United Nations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have made in recent years to improve the situation of children, establish overall goals and follow up national programmes.

With the adoption in 1991 of the Declaration and the Plan of Action for Children by the highest authorities of our Governments meeting at the World Summit for Children, the international community began a collective effort destined to have profound impact on the future of mankind throughout the twenty-first century. Progress has been made in a number of areas of health care and in the protection of children and national programmes have begun to be developed to pursue the goals of the Summit. Above all, however, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a historic landmark in acknowledging that children have rights and in making it possible to tackle the problems of childhood on the basis of the development of a culture of human rights.

From that stems the importance of this special session and of its draft outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children", which is sure to renew the momentum achieved a decade ago through the establishment of a series of goals, strategies and actions based upon national evaluations of the progress made since the Summit. Uruguay wishes to thank the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, to whose intelligence and generous dedication we shall owe the successful outcome of this special session of the Assembly.

The holding of relevant conferences and the publication of specialized information are important milestones in establishing a universal shared awareness that guides and obliges our Governments to pursue the

struggle against all forms of discrimination against children. Uruguay is among the countries that rank high on the human development index. In that regard, we wish to inform the Assembly about the significant progress made since 1990, when Uruguay embraced the commitments set out in the United Nations Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children.

As a country with deep respect for the law, Uruguay's principal and ongoing goal is the observance and strict implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which our country ratified in 1990 through its law number 16,137. Uruguay can state that, through the programmes that have been implemented by various Governments over the past decade, it has successfully achieved its main goals, including health and nutrition coverage, school enrolment, the fight against poverty and the integration of children into the social life of the nation.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development index places Uruguay among those countries that enjoy a high level of development. In the most recent index, in 2001, our country was ranked thirty-seventh, the highest ranking among Latin American countries. For its part, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has consistently certified that Uruguay is the Latin American country that most effectively fights poverty and that has the best performance in the distribution of wealth. In that respect, the living conditions of our children generally reflect the favourable situation of the adult population. It should be pointed out that these achievements have been made against a backdrop of economic downturn, which serves to underscore the ongoing and resolute commitment of successive Uruguayan Governments and Administrations.

Seventy-five per cent of our national budget is allocated to such social areas as education, health, housing and social welfare. Expenditure on education accounts for 15.5 per cent and investments in public health for 11 per cent of the overall budget. The National Children's Institute, the official body dedicated to the education of children and young people without families, has a budget that is larger than two of the three branches of Government, namely, the legislative and judicial branches. These figures, which reflect a political decision to promote equality, do not include the vast network of official and private programmes and institutions carrying out very important work.

In the field of education, we have succeeded in achieving universal enrolment of pre-school children between the ages of 4 and 5 — a pioneering effort on our continent. In the poorest areas, there are currently 65 full-time schools that provide students from broken families with all-day access to school, together with food and psychological support. Uruguay already has the funding to extend this service to 300 schools that will serve 50,000 pupils. This forms part of an effective and intelligent programme to combat poverty and to sever the roots of marginalization. Ninety-nine per cent of pupils aged 4 to 12 years are covered by the system, which means that our universal education system has a very low drop-out rate and a retention rate of 98 per cent. We provide free textbooks, have begun bilingual schools and are trying to expand classes in computing and English.

The formal educational structure is supplemented by assistance centres for children and families linked with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), neighbourhood associations and religious institutions that, with State support, serve another 18,000 homeless children. Here we are truly providing full coverage of needs.

Impressive work has been done in the area of immunization against the principal diseases. There has also been a significant drop in HIV/AIDS figures; here, the country is also meeting General Assembly mandates. All of this reflects a major reduction in the infant mortality rate, which dropped from 30 per 1,000 in 1984 to 14 per 1,000 today. We are of course not satisfied with that, and hereby renew our commitment to continue to reduce these important numbers. This success has been possible because Uruguay's social structure includes 98-per-cent access to potable water, a poverty rate of 5.6 per cent — which is continuing to drop from the 1990 level of 11.8 per cent — and a nutritional programme that ensures that Uruguay is able to meet United Nations and UNICEF standards. Nevertheless, 3.4 per cent of our children below the age of 5 suffer from malnutrition and 1.22 per cent from severe malnutrition. This fact obliges us to continue to work actively.

As a consequence of external shocks, our country is today experiencing an economic recession that has been under way for four years. It is therefore possible

that some figures for poverty and social exclusion have increased in recent years. But there is no doubt that, through international financing, we now have $160 million for specialized programmes dedicated to children and families and to upgrading sub-standard housing. As a result, we are in a position to assert that we are going to overcome the current difficulties.

Despite all of these encouraging results, some problems remain. Here, before the Assembly, Uruguay commits itself to the following policies for the coming years: to reduce even further the infant mortality rate; to make even greater advances in the fight against poverty and marginalization; to combat the growing phenomenon of teenage pregnancy that is emerging in all societies, including ours; to attract young school dropouts back to the educational system at the intermediate level; to implement a special penal system through the adoption — already partially approved by the Parliament — of a code on children and adolescents in order to respond intelligently and effectively to the problem of juvenile offenders; and to intensify programmes to neutralize the problem of street children.

With the advances that our country has made in the past 10 years, we are in a position to pledge, before the Assembly, that the little country of Uruguay will be able to resolve the current situation, which, as has been suggested, also prevails in other nations.

Naturally, we should like to congratulate all participants, heads of State and organizers of this session. Everything that we do for children, however, will amount to little if the world does not achieve peace, tolerance and full respect for human rights. We are here to make policies in favour of children; but above all, we are here also to ensure for them a world of peace and tolerance, now and in the future. In conclusion, Uruguay would like to reaffirm its devotion to international law, democracy and peace.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, may I remind speakers that statements in debate are limited to five minutes.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Ali Mohamed Shein, Vice-President of the United Republic Of Tanzania.

Mr. Shein (United Republic of Tanzania): I wish to express to you, Mr. President, and to the other members of the Bureau our sincere congratulations on your election to lead this special session of the General Assembly. I should also like to thank the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, Her Excellency Ms. Patricia Durrant, and her Bureau for their hard work in preparing for this session.

His Excellency Benjamin William Mkapa, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, very much regrets that he could not attend this important session because of the exigencies of his office. However, he sends his best wishes for a successful session.

As a follow-up to the World Summit for Children, we held a national summit in 1991 after which a national plan of action was adopted. We agreed then to reduce by half the 1990 rates of infant and maternal mortality and the mortality rate for children under 5 by the year 2000. We committed ourselves to increasing literacy and to making clean water and sanitation accessible to all. Indeed, in the first five years we recorded satisfactory progress. However, that success story was compromised by the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

In Tanzania, children make up more than 54 per cent of the population. In recognition of that fact, my Government formulated policies and strategies to address the rising challenges to the development of children. The Tanzania Development Vision 2025 programme, the Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Child Survival, Protection and Development Programme were put in place. In addition, we have enacted legislation aimed at protecting children from exploitation and at safeguarding their basic rights. Concurrently, my Government is in the process of ratifying the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the two Optional Protocols of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In my country, more than 50 per cent of households are unable to meet their basic needs. Under such circumstances, poverty defines every aspect of a child's development. A child born in poverty will, in all probability, end up in poverty. Therefore, in order to realize a world fit for children, we have to break that cycle of poverty. Our work in that regard is constrained by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, which has proved to be one of the greatest threats to the fulfilment of children's rights. In my country, mother-to-child transmission affects about 80,000 newborn babies. Our challenge now is to mobilize the necessary resources and partnerships that are so crucial in dealing with the

pandemic. My Government, with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund and other development partners, has initiated the establishment of five mother-to-child transmission programme sites. They aim to provide counselling, testing and treating pregnant mothers diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

To compound the situation, the predominance of conflicts in many countries has not spared children. In some cases, children have been drafted as child soldiers, while in others they have been forced into strange lands with their childhood interrupted and their human rights violated. For those children, a world fit for them has yet to be created. Since peace is synonymous with development, which enables children to develop, it is our responsibility to protect our children from the horrors of armed conflict.

In many developing countries, the servicing of external debt overshadows the provision of basic social services. Undoubtedly, in poor countries, children are the hardest hit. My Government has always advocated sustainable debt financing as an important element of mobilizing resources. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the international community to resolve the problem of unsustainable debt in the framework of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. Having reached the completion point, Tanzania is now channelling the resources that would have serviced the debt to priority sectors such as education, health, water and rural roads.

In conclusion, the foremost needs of the African child are peace, education, good health and love. Indeed, all children — as the Children's Forum reaffirmed — demand to be given an opportunity to live their lives as children. Their formative years, once wasted, cannot be regained. It is ironic that, at a time when the world has accumulated huge resources, today's children are crying out for basic services. We owe it to our children to marshal the necessary political will to provide for their basic needs. We ought not to fail them. The situation is urgent.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Alejandro Toledo Manrique, President of the Republic of Peru.

President Toledo Manrique (*spoke in Spanish*): I have come to this special session of the Assembly, whose theme is "A world fit for children", to reaffirm Peru's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as our specific commitments arising from the tenth Ibero-American Summit, held in Panama in 2000, and the eleventh Ibero-American Summit, held in Lima in 2001. I have come to reaffirm my country's commitment to children.

In developing countries such as Peru, poverty especially affects women and children. The time has come for the world, armed with a vision for the future, to face the challenges of a globalized and competitive world. We must not allow ourselves to be confined by new technologies. We cannot live on this new CNN culture alone. We cannot live on media and Internet alone. The global challenge today requires a strategic alliance between business, the State and civil society to tackle the poverty of children.

My Government and I, personally, have a commitment to the children of Peru, to *mestizo* Latin America and to the developing world. That commitment is not the political will of a single leader. Nor is it the outcome of a university professor's analysis. It is the commitment of someone who, since I opened my eyes on the first day of my life 56 years ago, discovered as a child and confronted the face of utter poverty. I cannot forget that face. As a result, as a head of State, I reaffirm in the Assembly my commitment to fight intensely against poverty, especially the poverty of children. I am committed once more to make social spending a top priority by allocating funds for investment in nutrition, health and education.

I am absolutely convinced that there is no better investment that a family or a society can make than to invest in our people's minds, especially the minds of children. The empirical evidence worldwide is overwhelming. The intellectual capacity of people is shaped in the first five years of life, even during gestation. As a result, if we tackle the question of world development with a vision for the future, we need to invest more in our children. I know that such a proposal will sound empty if we do not also seek creative ways of financing such new social spending. Therefore, I am announcing here that my Government has decided to significantly reduce military spending in order to redirect resources to social spending, especially to spending on children.

I wish to address the developed countries and the business leaders of the world. I say to them: we do not ask for handouts; allow us to seek our own future. Do not give us food to alleviate our poverty; open your

markets, as you ask us to do. With markets, we could produce, generate employment, have income and invest more in nutrition, health and education.

Finally, let us use technology and the managerial skills of the private sector to better direct social projects, especially for the poor children of the world.

The President: In call now on His Excellency Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister for Human Resources Development of India.

Mr. Joshi (India) (*spoke in Hindi; English text furnished by the delegation*): Children are society's most critical foundation; they shape its future. It is therefore only appropriate that the nations of the world should come together at this special session to reaffirm their common commitment to towards children and to pledge themselves to specific actions which would put children first and leave no child behind in the next decade.

The world's children can truly flourish and be secure only in a world of peace, non-violence and non-exploitation. Let me quote Mahatama Gandhi, who said several decades ago, "If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on real war against war, we shall have to begin with children."

We are indeed satisfied with the emphasis placed on strengthening the family as the basic and primary care-taking unit responsible for nurturing and ensuring the protection of children. Both traditionally and in contemporary India we believe that the right to a family is the most primeval and fundamental of all children's rights and that the family is the most vital unit for nurturing a child with the required love, emotional security and protection.

Childhood is seen as a continuum comprising different stages, each to be addressed differently. In our tradition, children must receive boundless love from the family for the first five years. Thereafter, until the age of 16, the concept of right and wrong and the meaning of values and duties must be instilled. After the age of 16, a child and parent should share an equation of friendship. The values and sense of duty inculcated in childhood become the greatest strengths of adulthood, while also strengthening society.

Let us resolve to strengthen the family as the most natural medium for providing for the protection, well-being and development of children and to safeguard the right of a child to be a child. And for those unfortunate children deprived of family love and care, let us address their needs with empathy and compassion and create a world in which all children have a home, adequate food, education and an opportunity to develop their full potential.

Poverty is indeed the greatest enemy of children, and poverty alleviation must begin with children. The optimal development of human resources is the single most critical and durable determinant for eliminating poverty because economic growth is accelerated through investment in children's health, nutrition and education. Poverty reduction is the target of all programmes of the Government of India with children at their centre. Our achievements vis-à-vis all indicators for children over the past decade have been positive, if not total, and, although we realize we still have a long road ahead, we are undeterred by the challenge. In November 2001 we launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, a national programme that aims to universalize elementary education by 2010, with special emphasis on the education of the girl child.

Progress is being made on a constitutional amendment to include the right to free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14 years as a fundamental right. Our National Commission for Children will be a statutory body to protect and monitor children's rights, and to review the implementation of laws and programmes meant for children.

We are also launching a mission to combat malnutrition in a time-bound framework, aimed particularly at breaking the intergenerational cycle that has perpetuated it so far. Systems have also been put in place to provide relief and rehabilitation and to alleviate the trauma of children in areas affected by natural calamities and violence.

We have, through our deliberations, committed ourselves jointly to a well-defined set of targets for children. Though we have not quantified the respective share of resources that would be mobilized from domestic and international sources, our coming together to adopt these targets is itself proof of our acceptance of a shared responsibility.

India is home to 380 million children, the largest child population in the world, and my Government reiterates its commitment to ensuring the rights, protection and complete development of every child in our country. As we reinforce our pledge today, let us

convert our consensus into action, overcome every unmet challenge and give concrete shape to the partnership to which we bind ourselves at this special session, so that every child is touched by it. And let us this moment share the grace of the closing sloka of the Rig Veda,

> "Common be our intention, common be our hearts, common be our thoughts, so that there is perfect unity among us."

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Peter Magvasi, Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovakia.

Mr. Magvasi (Slovakia) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, Sir, I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children.

Slovakia associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Spain on behalf of the European Union. Nevertheless, it is my honour and pleasure to make a statement on behalf of the Slovak Republic and to inform the Assembly about the efforts made by my country in an area that has priority today: child protection.

Allow me to express my gratitude and deep appreciation for the excellent work done by the Preparatory Committee on the outcome document, "A world fit for children". I wish to assure you, Mr. President, that Slovakia will continue to give its support to this important special session and to its successful conclusion.

Slovakia attaches great importance to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, as well as to agreements concluded in this area. We are devoting continued attention to the rights of the child, and we are taking the necessary measures, particularly in the social, economic and educational areas, as well as measures to provide housing and medical services.

Despite the progress that we and other countries have achieved, the international community still has a great deal of work to do to ensure the well-being of children.

Under the Constitution of Slovakia, marriage, fatherhood, motherhood and the family are given legal protection. Special protection is guaranteed also for children and juveniles. Children enjoy equal rights, whether they are born in or out of wedlock. Parents are responsible for the care, upbringing and education of children; indeed, children have a right to parental care. The rights of parents can be restricted, and infants may be separated from their parents, but only upon a court ruling, in accordance with the law. In addition, parents caring for children have the right to State assistance.

In 1998, we enacted a law on social assistance that covers this area. It provides the right to basic living conditions as well as to preventive and other types of health care. It provides assistance with material and social needs, social counselling, social and legal protection, social services, social assistance benefits, cash compensation, and allowances for nursing care.

In 2000 Slovakia set up a Slovak Committee on the Rights of the Child. It consists of representatives of the central organs of our State administration, local governmental and non-governmental organizations, and it proposes measures to resolve these questions.

A preventive programme has been launched that deals with the status of children in society. It devotes particular attention to the protection of children from physical and emotional abuse, drug use and other pathological social phenomena. It focuses also on children in institutional and foster care and on those in life-threatening situations.

Last year Slovakia became a State party to the Hague Convention of 1993 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption; the Hague Convention of 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction; and the European Convention of 1980 on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children.

A great deal of work is currently being done to change the legal norms of civil, family, criminal and social security law. We still have a great challenge ahead of us: elaborating a national plan of action on the rights of the child, which we must do by June of this year.

A number of non-governmental organizations are active in the area of the protection of and assistance to children. Their efforts are aimed at providing financial assistance, supplementing that provided by the State. The State also gives financial support to special projects undertaken by NGOs that aim to help not only children but also entire families that are in difficult

straits. They also help children with mental and physical disabilities, children with special needs, and children in institutional care.

In conclusion, allow me to assure the Assembly that my country will continue to work consistently to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Andreas Moushouttas, Minister of Labour and Social Insurance of Cyprus.

Mr. Moushouttas (Cyprus): It is an honour for my country, Cyprus, and for me personally, to participate in this special session of the General Assembly on children. I wish to convey to the Assembly the cordial greetings of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Glafcos Clerides, and to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the excellent organization of this special session.

The 1990 World Summit for Children, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into force in the same year, were landmarks in the history of children's issues. For the first time ever, a political consensus was built around children, placing them firmly on the international agenda. The Summit embraced the principles enshrined in the Convention and was, in effect, the first global movement aspiring to convert those principles into action.

We recognize that much progress has been made in the years since the Summit, especially in the areas of survival and health. We agree, however, with the assessment of the Secretary-General, that a lot remains to be done to achieve the Summit's goals. I am confident that this special session will take up the challenge of adopting strategies that will not only complete the unfinished agenda of the World Summit and further promote the human rights of children, but also facilitate the exercise of those rights, with particular emphasis on the active participation of children in society.

To that end, I believe that the special session should focus on the importance of investing in children and cultivating a new vision of children — a vision that considers them not merely as objects of protection and passive recipients of services, but as legal subjects with their own rights and with the capacity to participate in decision-making on matters concerning them.

Cyprus is a small island in the south-east of the Mediterranean, with a population of about 700,000. It is traditionally a child-centred society, with a strong family focus, as measured by societal values. Since the early stages of the establishment of the Republic in 1960, we have aspired to improve the situation of children and have ratified all the relevant major international instruments of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and the Council of Europe. As a result, we have developed a comprehensive legislative framework, as well as social policies and structures, to meet the needs of children and to support families in the upbringing of their children.

Our desire to create a better world for all vulnerable groups in society, including children, is reflected in State expenditure for the implementation of social programme, which constitutes 37 per cent of total public expenditure. Recognizing the importance of joint action for the promotion of social development, the Government is working in partnership with non-governmental organizations and local community councils by providing technical assistance and annual grants for the operation of social programmes and services. Last year, 50 per cent of State grants were directed at children's programmes run by the voluntary sector.

We are not claiming that there is no room for improvement in the situation of children in Cyprus. On the basis of our experience in monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in line with positive international trends concerning children, we are currently focusing on improving the coordination of children's policies and programmes at the governmental, non-governmental and private levels; updating legislation and administrative procedures ensuring children's participation in decisions which concern them; undertaking the systematic collection of data on children; and raising public awareness of children's participatory rights.

These goals have been incorporated in a National Plan of Action for Children, covering the period 2000-2004, which was prepared in close collaboration with all parties involved with children's issues, from both the governmental and non-governmental sectors. What is regrettable, however, is that the Government is prevented from implementing this National Plan of Action for the benefit of all the children in Cyprus.

Due to the continuing occupation by a neighbouring country of almost 37 per cent of our territory, children and families living in the occupied areas cannot be reached. In the case of Cyprus, creating a world fit for children necessitates a political settlement that will allow all Cypriot children, irrespective of origin, to have equal access to services so that they can live in peace and enjoy their basic human rights, including their right to associate freely with each other and learn from each other's cultures.

A world fit for children presupposes worldwide peace. If we are to create a peaceful and secure future for our children — a future that will allow them to realize their human rights and fundamental freedoms — we must link our work to peace-building agendas. We must have the political will to invest in our children and facilitate their active participation in society, not only for their sake but also for the benefit of society as a whole. This is because children who are provided with conditions guaranteeing their survival, protection and development and with opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that concern them will grow to their full human potential and become active and conscientious members of democratic societies of the future.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paula Bloomfield, Minister of Education of Tonga.

Mr. Bloomfield (Tonga): It is an honour and a privilege for me to address the Assembly on behalf of the Government, the people and the children of the Kingdom of Tonga on the occasion of this major General Assembly special session on children. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, as well as Mrs. Annan, for having invited His Royal Highness Prince 'Ulukalala Lavaka Ata, the Prime Minister of Tonga, and his good wife, Princess Nanasipau'u, to personally attend this crucial gathering. However, due to prior engagements, their Highnesses cannot be with us this week, but their thoughts and good wishes are with us as we deliberate critical issues concerning children all over the world.

Tonga's formal recognition of the welfare and rights of children dates back to 1927, when the first act of Parliament legislated compulsory education. Today, education continues to be compulsory and free for all children between the ages of 5 and 14, or unless a child has completed six years of primary education. The Government's allocation to education has never fallen below 11 per cent of its total budget during the past five years and has always represented the largest portion of Government spending, when not second to healthcare. Given the Government's commitment to the development of education, universal access to education has long been achieved for primary education and was guaranteed for secondary education for the first time in the year 2001.

I am here today, however, not to proudly boast of Tonga's accomplishments in health and education, but rather to join each and every country and organization represented here to fully demonstrate and express Tonga's support for and commitment to the welfare and well-being of children worldwide. I applaud the United Nations for this stimulating initiative to bring together heads of State and/or their representatives to discuss important issues relating to children, and also to pay tribute to the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

Not too long ago, Tonga was far behind in discussing issues relating to child abuse and violence because of cultural values and moral taboos, but with accelerating political, economic and cultural changes, it has seen the crucial need to break this silence. For many of us, the United Nations symbolizes our hope for peace and the vision it promotes will become the vision we promote and try to instil in the minds of our children.

Tonga is a nation with a young population, which is all the more reason that Tonga should place paramount importance on its young people and enrich them as integral members of society, essential development partners and the future leaders of the nation. Owing to the vulnerability of small island States and children to the dangers of certain forms of globalization, our children will continue to be placed at risk and there will always be aggravating effects on their well-being if we do not find the means to protect them.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In my experience as a father and as Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Youth, Sports and Culture, it is deeply saddening and disturbing to see children in my own nation who are addicted to drugs, wandering and fighting in the streets. I constantly ask myself: "Where have I gone wrong?

What do I do?" I should ask: "Do you share the same concern?"

No doubt, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child will feature prominently in policy discussions this week. The Government of the Kingdom of Tonga ratified the Convention in 1995. Reflecting further its political will to improve the welfare of children in the Kingdom, it established in 1997 a National Coordinating Committee for Children, comprising governmental and non-governmental organizations alike, with an overall mandate to provide policy advice to the Government. Tonga considers the blend of women, Government and non-governmental organizations as crucial to achieving the goals of the Global Movement for Children and particularly of the "Say Yes for Children" campaign.

I say "women" because they play an extremely important role as a first teacher in conceiving and bringing up a child during the fundamental formative years of his or her life. The right of every child to have a mother who is loving and caring is also utmost, for without tender loving care, what good will his or her future be if the roots of love and peace have not been planted deeply within?

I also mentioned non-governmental organizations because they are increasingly becoming essential development partners. In the case of Tonga, they have continued to bridge the gaps between the mother as a first teacher and formal primary education through early childhood care facilities, and similarly, between secondary education and the work place through technical and vocational education and training opportunities. With this in mind, the objective of the Government now is to include children aged three to four into its basic education programme. Tonga is also anticipating the opening in July this year of its Institute of Higher Education, including distance learning through information and communication technology approaches, through which educational opportunities in the post-secondary and non-formal sectors will be enhanced.

Anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that child prostitution is emerging in our country. This is a manifestation of our increasing exposure to western cultures and emigration. Crude statistics indicate that Tongan households' expenditure far exceeds their income. The increasing problem of unemployment leaves many people vulnerable and frustrated by the lack of employment opportunities. Consequently, the entry into the sex industry becomes appealing to a number of young girls because of the monetary awards. In an effort to combat such activities, Her Majesty the Queen of Tonga established a refuge where girls can be protected and maintained. Similarly, the Center for Women and Children also responded to the needs of girls formerly employed by Tonga's only brothel with emergency relief assistance through the provision of shelter, food and clothing.

Having briefly outlined the situation of children in Tonga, I am convinced that the outcome of this special session on children will significantly advance the contribution of children towards national development. I sincerely hope that the Children's Forum and the Forum on Women's Leadership for Children, convened this week as indispensable components of the special session on children, have enabled participants to develop bonds of friendship, cooperation and mutual understanding to make the world a better, safer and more peaceful place.

Additionally, I would like to stress the importance Tonga attaches to the session's plenary meetings and round-table discussions. They will certainly provide Tonga with a wealth of information and opportunities and, equally important, with the impetus to refine its National Plan of Action for Children.

Allow me to extend to the Assembly my personal assurance that Tonga is ready to play its role to the full in this international struggle for child enhancement and against perverse abuse of the most fundamental rights of the child.

In the interests of time limits and brevity, I have only read out excerpts from my full statement, copies of which have been circulated.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rashid Abdullah Al-Noaimi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Noaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, I have the honour to convey to Mr. Han Seung-soo our congratulations on his election as President of this important special session and to wish him every success. We would also like to express our appreciation for the work of the United Nations

Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other relevant regional and international organizations.

Despite all the positive national, regional and international achievements to advance the status of children in accordance with the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, millions of children in developing countries and especially the least developed among them are still living in dire social and economic conditions. They suffer from poverty, malnutrition, epidemic diseases, illiteracy, unemployment and the deterioration of their environment. Those conditions are aggravated by the debt crisis and by reductions in governmental and non-governmental development assistance from donor countries and regional and international financial development organizations. That suffering is further aggravated as a consequence of regional conflicts, occupation and human rights violations. In that regard, recent international statistics indicate that child mortality has exceeded 10 million cases and that the number of children deprived of education is approaching 100 million, of which 60 per cent are girls. The statistics also indicate that millions of children are homeless and have no access to food, potable water or appropriate health care.

We recognize that regional and international cooperation is essential to containing these problems in implementation of the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children and of obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Further, in order to confront the huge challenges that impede the provision of the most basic elements for the natural human development of millions of underprivileged children around the world, it is very important that all countries shoulder their national responsibility to deal with these conditions and their negative impact on national and regional stability and security. We also call upon developed countries and international financial and development institutions to fulfil their commitments and their pledges to provide multi-purpose assistance to developing countries, in particular the neediest among them, in order to help them rebuild their development infrastructure, especially as regards issues concerning child and family affairs, educational facilities, healthcare and nutrition. In the same vein, we demand that children not be exploited in military service and armed conflicts, drug trafficking, the sale of human organs, hard labour or any other practices that violate human values and humanitarian norms, religious beliefs or the cultural heritage of peoples.

As we gather in the General Assembly to review the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, we must point out that Palestinian children like Mohammed Al-Durra and Jman Hajjou are daily being killed or physically and emotionally maimed, by Israeli military forces. We wonder why the international community, and the Security Council in particular, are ignoring international calls to protect the Palestinian people, Palestinian children in particular, from these criminal violations. We therefore stress from this rostrum the urgency of providing immediate international protection to Palestinian children to ensure that they enjoy safety and well-being like other children in the world, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the principles of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Similarly, we ask for relief from the suffering inhumanely imposed on the children of Iraq, who face daily tragedies as a consequence of the sanctions imposed on their country.

Guided by the noble directives of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the ruler of the United Arab Emirates, who believes that nurturing the individual requires providing the necessary care and attention to young people — who are the nucleus of the family, society and the State as a whole — the State of the United Arab Emirates has made available, both nationally and internationally, the material and moral resources necessary to promote the status of children and to develop their personal skills and abilities.

On the national level, the State has enacted laws to enhance the status of children and mothers. For instance, article 16 of our Constitution provides free care for mothers and children and for disabled persons who are unable to look after themselves. These laws also provide for compulsory elementary education and for free education at all other levels.

The United Arab Emirates has acted on its awareness of the necessity to promote the health and well-being of the child. It provides health care for children, mothers and families so that children can grow up able to contribute to the ongoing process of the country's sustainable development. The active and constructive role in child and women's affairs played by the wife of the ruler of our State, Her Highness Sheikha Fatimah bint Mubarak, on the national,

regional and international levels cannot be overemphasized. The High Council of Childhood and Motherhood was established in the United Arab Emirates to attain goals consistent with Her Highness's convictions in that regard.

Recognizing the importance of international cooperation in this field, the United Arab Emirates ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996, in accordance with its cultural heritage and religious beliefs and mindful of the extensive changes that were taking place in international relations with regard to children's affairs. Stressing the need to relieve the suffering of developing countries, cooperating with friendly countries and implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, the United Arab Emirates took the initiative in providing humanitarian relief and development assistance to many international organizations to relieve the suffering of people in developing countries in particular children.

In conclusion, we hope that this session will take positive decisions aimed at ensuring a better life and better opportunities for the children of the modern world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Highness Shaikha Sabika Bint Ebrahim Al-Khalifa, President of the Supreme Council for Women of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Sheikha Sabika Bint Ebrahim Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure, at the outset, to convey to the President the greetings of the King of Bahrain, His Majesty Shaikh Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, and his wish that this special session will be crowned with success.

The importance that the Kingdom of Bahrain attaches to childhood is manifested in its Constitution and in the many laws that govern all aspects of the protection, care and welfare of children. That importance has been translated into concrete measures in the social, economic, cultural, health and education fields and in other actions aimed at attaining the desired objectives. The establishment of the National Committee of Childhood in 1999 was a highly effective step in that regard.

The legal system as it relates to children's rights in the Kingdom of Bahrain is based partly on the provisions of Islamic law and conforms to those of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in the framework of a comprehensive approach to children's rights in various fields, with a view to ensuring children's physical and moral security, legal protection and social welfare. Furthermore, laws relating to children are now being revised with the aim of creating conditions that contribute to an increase in and enhancement of current accomplishments in the field of child protection and care.

These actions are being taken within the framework of the comprehensive reform plan that the Kingdom is currently implementing, under the leadership of His Majesty the King, in various constitutional, legislative, economic and social fields, as embodied in the National Action Charter and in accordance with a plebiscite in which Bahraini women took part. As we meet here today, municipal elections are taking place in the Kingdom of Bahrain, where women, having obtained their political rights, are participating both as voters and as candidates. The comprehensive reform plan will undoubtedly have positive effects on children's issues and on the situation of children in the Kingdom.

The past two decades have been marked by notable developments in the area of legislation pertaining to children's rights worldwide. We hope that compliance with such legislation will mark the coming decade, in which we hope to see a bright and prosperous future for our children and in which we hope that States will eliminate the discrepancy between laws and their application — a discrepancy that accounts for the tragic conditions that many children endure.

We have considered carefully the Secretary-General's comprehensive report on children (A/S-27/3). In that connection, we should like to make the following observations. First, with regard to the protection of children in armed conflict, we point to the importance of taking practical measures against those who violate children's rights in such conflicts. That would require the enactment, in coordination with international judicial bodies, of laws to protect children.

Secondly, although the report did not address the situation of children under foreign occupation, it is incumbent upon us to recall the plight of the suffering Palestinian children, who are subjected to the worst of conditions under Israeli occupation. In condemning all

the offences perpetrated by the Israeli forces of occupation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which have caused the death of hundreds of Palestinian children, the Kingdom of Bahrain calls upon the international community to take a moral and humanitarian stand to put an end to those acts of aggression against the Palestinian people. What is taking place in occupied Palestine is not only a violation of international humanitarian law and of the Fourth Geneva Convention; it is also a breach of all human values and norms, and constitutes a threat to peace and security. That has been emphasized by His Majesty the King of Bahrain, who has said that

> "Security must be enjoyed by everyone or by no one. That is the case by virtue of the principle of uniformity of interaction and mutual influence among all parts of the world, in which any discrimination, double standard or monopolization of prosperity, freedom and justice by one party to the detriment of others is unacceptable".

Thirdly, marked differences in the viewpoints were expressed during the preparatory meetings for this session. Some have endeavoured to depict these as cultural differences, but we regard them as conceptual differences that ought to be resolved through respect for the uniqueness and specific viewpoints of each culture, without prejudice and in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations.

Fourthly, in addressing the rising phenomenon of the use of children as soldiers in armed conflicts in many parts of the world, it is imperative that the various local and international factors at the root of that phenomenon be considered and that objective and humane solutions be found.

We look forward to a world of compassion, love and cooperation — a world in which children may live with honour, dignity and all the rights that almighty God has bestowed upon them and has ordained that they may enjoy. That is what we in the Kingdom of Bahrain — King and people, men and women — have determined to achieve, God willing.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Valentyna Dovzhenko, Minister of Family and Youth Affairs of Ukraine.

Ms. Dovzhenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): The holding of this special session of the General Assembly on children, which is a logical continuation of the World Summit for Children of 1990, is viewed in Ukraine as an event of historic significance. An extraordinary increase in public attention to the issue of improvement of the status of children, which reached its peak during the preparatory process for the special session, is important testimony to that.

Over a million Ukrainian citizens, adults and children, joined the worldwide campaign "Say yes for children". Personally taking part, the President of Ukraine, Leonid D. Kuchma, put forward a proposal to reduce world arms expenditures by 10 per cent and to direct the funds thus released to education, health, environmental protection and combating poverty. The implementation of such a proposal, which is consonant with the Secretary-General's report (A/S-27/3), would be a concrete manifestation of our concern for the future of children.

Care for the young generation is a subject of special attention for the Ukrainian State. Just a month after proclaiming State independence, in September 1991, Ukraine ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child as one of its first legislative acts. Today, an internal preparatory process is under way for the ratification of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention, which were signed by the President of Ukraine during the Millennium Summit.

The Ukrainian law on protection of childhood, adopted last year, defined that sphere as a strategic national priority. A number of comprehensive national programmes aimed at ensuring the legal and social protection of children and at creating conditions for their all-round development are being implemented in Ukraine.

Despite the considerable progress made in the implementation of those programmes, Ukraine continues to be confronted with the difficulties connected, in the first place, with the challenging and long-term process of social transformation.

We are particularly concerned about children's health in the context of the consequences of the Chernobyl tragedy: 1.2 million children, one of every 10 children, have been affected by the accident. Today, 16 years after the catastrophe, we continue to feel its consequences. Sixty per cent of thyroid cancer cases among children were diagnosed in the areas affected by the accident. The overall morbidity rate among children has increased threefold.

Ukraine, where the horrors of a technological catastrophe of unprecedented scale were fated to unfold before the world, cannot on its own solve all the problems caused by the disaster. United efforts by the international community are needed to overcome the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl accident and to ensure the survival and development of new generations. Ukraine, for its part, demonstrated resolve to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies in the future by voluntarily renouncing the world's third largest military nuclear arsenal and by fully decommissioning the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. That is why the provision of the draft outcome document, which underlines the need for protecting children from man-made disasters, is very important to my country.

We are grateful to the world community for the assistance that is being provided today. In particular, I would like to mention the fruitful cooperation of Ukrainian governmental and non-governmental organizations with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which has been supporting a range of special programmes. We also appreciate the assistance rendered by the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the Governments of donor countries and international charity funds.

At the same time, Ukraine needs further assistance from the world community in the implementation of its special programme for the medical and social rehabilitation of children suffering from the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The issues of children suffering from the consequences of natural and man-made disasters are being addressed in the draft outcome document, "A world fit for children", as are the problems of violence, exploitation, discrimination and armed conflict. Since the World Summit, the issue of the protection of children in armed conflict has acquired special significance and has become a permanent item on the Security Council's agenda. Ukraine actively advocates the need to give priority to protecting children in the peacekeeping efforts of the world community. We fully share the view expressed at the 7 May 2002 meeting of the Security Council that there is a need to include in the mandates of peacekeeping operations provisions for the protection of children, with particular attention to the special needs of girls.

It is no less alarming when children suffer as a result of harsh economic sanctions adopted by the United Nations. In that connection, Ukraine, like a number of other States, calls for putting in place all appropriate conditions for providing immediate humanitarian assistance to civilian populations, primarily to children.

In conclusion, I would like to express our conviction that consolidating the world community's efforts to secure conditions favourable to children's development throughout the world would be the best guarantee for achieving that goal.

I would like to take this opportunity to express particular gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy, and to all others who contributed to the organization and convening of this important forum.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Christine Bergmann, Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of Germany.

Ms. Bergmann (Germany): I would like to begin by expressing my support for the statement presented by the Spanish Presidency on behalf of the European Union.

The events of 11 September are a reminder to us that we must seek peaceful and political paths towards achieving understanding among peoples so as to deprive aggression and violence of the ground on which they can thrive.

In that same spirit, this special session of the General Assembly is the continuation of an important process which commenced with the World Summit for Children in 1990. Our efforts should start with a simple sentence: children's rights are human rights. That is unequivocally expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989.

Since 1990, we have made progress in many areas. Nevertheless, now as in the past, basic children's rights continue to be violated all over the world. We must find ways to ensure that the survival, the protection and the development of children are better ensured and supported than has been the case up to now. Every day, 18,000 children under the age of five still die of starvation. In the light of this alarming fact, it becomes clear how necessary it is to implement

extensive measures to fight the scourge of child poverty. The German Federal Government is supporting that strategy with its Programme of Action 2015, which aims to reduce extreme poverty worldwide and which also contains a debt-relief initiative.

Ten million children die each year from causes that could be avoided. HIV and AIDS are a threat to entire generations of children and young people. We in Germany began at a very early stage to initiate intensive education and prevention campaigns against HIV/AIDS; this has proved to be a successful strategy.

It is imperative that we incorporate our measures against HIV/AIDS into a comprehensive strategy to fight poverty. It is for that reason that the global combat against HIV/AIDS already constitutes an area of emphasis in German development cooperation.

In addition to those efforts, the German Government will contribute 150 million euro to a global health fund to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, which was set up by the Heads of State at the G-8 Summit in Genoa.

To combat poverty effectively means to provide children with broad access to basic education. We cannot simply accept the fact that 100 million children worldwide have no opportunity to attend school. We cannot simply look on while 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are forced to work and in some cases subjected to ruthless exploitation, even enslavement.

It is for this reason that Germany supports the implementation of Conventions 138 and 182 of the International Labour Organization, which we have also ratified, and provides considerable financial support to the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

Many children all over the world are affected by a considerable amount of violence. It is our duty to protect children from every form of violence. People who have been exposed to violence as children suffer as a result for the rest of their lives. They are deprived of their potential for development, and frequently a vicious circle of violence is set in motion.

As a result, Germany enacted a law on the right of children to a violence-free education. We are promoting models of violence-free upbringing by means of a campaign entitled "More Respect for Children".

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is an especially abominable form of violence. An estimated 2 million children are currently affected by sexual exploitation in countries all over the globe. The Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Yokohama in December 2001, made it clear that — despite an increased awareness of the problem of sexual exploitation of children in recent years, which has led to numerous measures being taken at all levels — the number of sexually exploited children, especially those exploited in connection with child trafficking and child prostitution, is growing worldwide.

That is why continued joint international efforts are required to combat the sexual exploitation of children effectively.

Girls are particularly affected by all of the factors I have mentioned. Living conditions for girls are still worse than those for boys, and girls continue to be deprived of their basic rights. It is our duty to eliminate these serious injustices and provide girls with equal opportunities for development. This will not only create equal opportunities; it will also release an enormous potential for development in society.

Taking children and young people seriously also means allowing them to have a say in making decisions which affect them. Therefore it is much more than a purely symbolic gesture that children not only took an active part, for the first time, in the preparation of this special session, but also participated actively during the session itself here in New York.

Only if we join forces will we be able to improve children's prospects for the future and implement children's rights all over the world. Children have been placed in our care, and they need our help. Let us continue to work towards creating a world in which the development of children is the focus of our attention and our efforts. That is our most important task.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aurelio Varela, Minister of Social Action of Paraguay.

Mr. Varela (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Paraguay, which I have the honour to head at this special session, wishes to reaffirm its commitment to children and adolescents — a commitment that is evidenced by the considerable progress that we have made in the past decade.

However, while we have made headway even in new areas of action, I must point out that, with respect to the goals of the 1990 Summit, shortcomings remain in the areas of health and education.

Paraguay would like to express its particular gratitude to Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, for her dedication to the Committee's work and to the success of this session.

Despite the fact that available resources have significantly increased and that social programmes have been enhanced, they remain inadequate to fully and adequately meet the most urgent needs of boys, girls and adolescents, in particular those who are at risk or who live in poverty. For these reasons, we believe that our national poverty-reduction strategy will be a key instrument in addressing our target population, considered in the strategy as one of the most vulnerable groups requiring significant and special attention.

Regrettably, global poverty is spreading to include ever-increasing numbers of children and adolescents. Paraguay has a very young population: 41 per cent of its overall population is under the age of 15, and 32 per cent of its inhabitants are living in poverty. However, 42 per cent of children under the age of 15 are living in poverty — 10 percentage points higher than the average — a clear example of the phenomenon of the infantilization of poverty.

Our country has experienced significant changes in the past decade, but even though the long period of authoritarianism ended in 1989, we are still learning how to live in a democracy. In that same period we have experienced a significant contraction of the economy.

In the area of regional integration, Paraguay is a founding member State of the Southern Common Market, along with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, and the associated countries Chile and Bolivia. This has resulted in greater exchanges, but also in adjustment problems between the different economies that make up the group; our country is particularly vulnerable because of its status as a less developed country.

Within these limits, we would like to highlight our comprehensive policies to promote the status of children, beginning with the example of the substantive increase that has taken place in social spending.

In 1990, social spending represented 3 per cent of the gross domestic product, while in 1998 it reached 8.2 per cent, primarily in the area of education. Expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product, central Government spending on primary and intermediate education and on health care for mothers and children, as well as for those under 19 years of age, grew from 2.5 per cent in 1991 to 4.3 per cent in 1998 — an increase of 72 per cent over nine years. Education was one of the sectors that benefited most from the increase in social spending, absorbing 1.4 per cent of gross domestic product in 1991 and 3.2 per cent in 1998. During the same period, spending on health care, including for mothers and children, remained stable at 1.1 per cent of gross domestic product.

Education is undergoing a thorough transformation thanks to the reforms that began in 1994. Those reforms have brought about major changes in access to pre-school education. Enrolment has reached 90 per cent in the first two grades of primary education.

Other substantive progress has been made in the legal and institutional spheres. In 1990, we incorporated the Convention on the Rights of the Child into our national legislation. In 2001, our Code on Children and Adolescents entered into force, and the Secretariat for Children and Adolescents was created. With the recent adoption of that Code, we have replaced a policy that addressed problems on an individual basis with one focusing on comprehensive protection, because, the daily application of the former Code on Minors of 1981 had been only partial. The new Code envisages a national system for children and adolescents, and an executive Government organ, the National Secretariat for Children and Adolescents. This will make it possible to formulate and implement State policies in this area. It will also mean a new way of involving children and adolescents, as well as changes in the penal system for adolescents, the role of community institutions and regulations governing adolescent labour. This wide range of challenges requires immediate action.

The Code also incorporates new approaches to children that have been developed by State institutions, with international cooperation and the assistance of civil society. These include responses to the sexual exploitation of children, child and adolescent labour in public spaces and child abuse. The Secretariat for Social Action, working in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Union and the United Nations Children's Fund, has carried out

activities that are focused on these areas. The Secretariat for Social Action is according high priority to the development of a social policy aimed specifically at children and adolescents at risk so that they can receive State and civil-society assistance in accordance with their particular protection and development needs.

The past decade was marked by a sincere and productive effort to combine initiatives, despite the difficulties involved in coordinating institutions and developing common strategies. Our main achievement has been the joint work between the public sector and civil society in promoting and defending children's rights. The increasing visibility and importance of children's issues, political and democratic change, the urgent need for joint Government and civil society efforts and the support of the private sector all came together in that work. There is still a long way to go, but we have taken the important step of learning how to work together in a coordinated manner.

The challenges are many. The necessary starting point is the gathering together of ideas at this special session so that we put children and adolescents at the top of our agenda — a task that has not to date been consistently assigned importance or accorded sufficient time and resources.

The first challenge is the fight against poverty. Given the need to address deficiencies in the social arena and to abide by the commitments made at the 1995 Copenhagen Social Summit, Paraguay took its first steps towards consolidating its social authority by establishing the Secretariat for Social Action, whose focus is on two main areas. The first is the formulation of social policies, and the second is the reduction of poverty and the provision of care to vulnerable groups through the use of social investment funds. Draft legislation is currently before Congress relating to the reorganization of the central State administration and the creation of a ministry of social development, which will make possible the institutional consolidation of the social sector and ensure greater efficiency in social investment.

The second challenge is to reach agreement on State policies for children and adolescents, whom we must affirm as subjects of development with the right to participate. In this regard, we have made some progress — albeit in a sectoral manner and without formulating a comprehensive vision of the problem or of development. We must now establish agreements in the medium and long term that can be maintained even in unstable political environments. The National Plan of Action for Children could serve as a reference point.

Furthermore, the involvement — according to their level of maturity — of children and adolescents is a new area, which is gaining widespread support. We must also establish standards to protect their rights. With the education reform that is under way and with the law on adoptions, which respectively cover comprehensive and specific aspects, we have made progress in this area, although much remains to be done and much to learn.

The strengthening of institutions and the establishment of State policies in the social sector is a third challenge. Strengthening social institutions offers promise, with the State reform proposal presented to Parliament by the executive branch; this calls for the creation of a Ministry of Social development. The reform process raises the entire social sphere to institutional status, placing it at the highest level of State policy, making it clearly visible and according it high priority in public policies. The proposal to establish a Ministry of Social Development states that social protection and well-being should be at the centre of State economic policy, and that the benefits of inclusive economic growth must be achieved through social policies that give priority to the most vulnerable groups in society.

Continuing international cooperation, as well as cooperation among the public sector, civil society and the private sector, is a fourth area that needs to be developed. Global and national policies to support children and adolescents are crucial. On the one hand, we must learn from the wealth of international experience and translate it into positive action at the national level — something that we hope to be able to do as a result of this special session. On the other hand, we must also increase technical and financial cooperation at the national and local levels between State institutions and civil society. Consultations with child rights advisers suggest that such cooperation is possible and that it can be fruitful.

We would like to point out that the guidelines and goals to be established at this special session should not lead us to forget the basic objectives of the least developed countries, which are the starting point for more ambitious, complex and necessary tasks. The

rights to survival, growth and development remain important objectives for countries such as Paraguay.

Finally, my country reaffirms its commitment to children and adolescents as our best legacy and as the best investment for the future of our nations.

The Acting President: Before calling on the next speaker, I would like to request representatives to be good enough to move quietly through the aisles as they exit and enter the General Assembly Hall in order not to disturb the speaker. I rely on those present to keep the noise level down so that speakers can at least read out their statements without interruption.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Karel Březina, Minister of Government, Head of the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Březina (Czech Republic): On behalf of the Czech delegation, I would like to express my congratulations to all those who have been instrumental in organizing this session. We are confident that the personal commitment of all of us to the cause of children will make this special session a success. It will reinforce our efforts to realize the goals of the World Summit for Children and focus our attention on the new goals proposed as a reflection of the changing nature of challenges facing the children of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Czech Republic views these targets as an essential contribution to our progress towards the full implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

Equally, the Czech Republic fully allies itself with the statement delivered yesterday by the Spanish Presidency of the European Union.

I have the honour to bring with me a personal message from President Václav Havel addressed to the participants of this special session. Copies of the message are at their disposal.

The World Summit for Children in 1990 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child represented major turning points towards a joint commitment for planning and action in support of children around the world. The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and its Plan of Action were also important cornerstones for the advancement of the status of children and the protection of their rights as the main means of securing their well-being.

Preparations for this special session, including the completion of the Czech Republic's end-decade national review report, provided our Government with an excellent opportunity to examine what had been accomplished and what has yet to be resolved. The experience and comments of citizens and non-governmental organizations on the draft national report were helpful and proved the significance and necessity of mutual respect and cooperation among the Government, civil society and the private sector over the complex issues of sustainable social development.

The impact of the conclusions of the World Summit for Children has been reflected in many aspects of our policies concerning children. The Czech Republic welcomes, in particular, the entry into force of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, one on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the other on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It is my honour to inform the Assembly that the Czech Republic ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2001 as the fourteenth State party. The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography is now in the process of ratification.

Our Government appreciates Convention No. 182 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the worst forms of child labour as an extremely important step of the international community towards the protection of all children's rights and the final and total elimination of child labour. Therefore, the Czech Republic ratified that Convention in 2001 and hopefully, by the end of 2002, will also finalize the ratification of ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment.

Since the World Summit, a number of measures have been taken in terms of new legislation and government and ministerial decisions related to children and families. In 1998, the Government of the Czech Republic established its Human Rights Council, which became a consulting and coordinating body for issues connected to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the jurisdiction of the Czech Republic. One of the eight sections of this Council deals with issues relating to the rights of the child according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1999, the Government approved the Guidelines of the Government Policy towards the Younger Generation until the year 2002. It thereby accepted

responsibility for the development of the younger generation and for creating conditions for its broad participation in the social, political and economic life of our country.

In this context, the Government also created a temporary body — the National Committee for the Family, Children and Youth — headed at the ministerial level and involving representatives of governmental as well as non-governmental institutions. The objective of the Committee was to assist the Government in drafting its pro-family policy and in creating a system of measures supportive of children and families in difficult situations.

My Government welcomes the focus of the report of the Secretary-General and of the special session's draft final document on such core challenges as poverty eradication, the prevention of armed conflict, protection from violence, discrimination and the fight against HIV/AIDS. The Government of the Czech Republic places special emphasis on children's right to protection from abuse and violence and to quality education. We are convinced that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols should be an underlying framework for our future actions in this direction.

The evaluation of the fulfilment of our goals should be performed regularly at all levels, based on comparable and transparent internationally agreed indicators, in order to enable Governments, regions and societies to exchange good examples, share experience and plan mutually supportive cooperation.

In conclusion, let me express our appreciation for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other organizations that have made a significant contribution to promoting the rights and well-being of children and our special thanks to UNICEF for the work it has done in preparing this special session.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Eveline Herfkens, Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands.

Ms. Herfkens (Netherlands): As a Development Minister, I have always said that donors should stop lecturing and start listening to the recipients themselves. As an adult, I feel that we should stop lecturing and instead start listening to our young people. With your permission, Mr. President, I would therefore like to cede the floor to Willemijn Aerdts, our youth representative.

Ms. Aerdts (Netherlands): The fact that I am standing here means that youth participation is taken seriously, but the fact that I am only one of the few youth representatives standing here means that is it not taken seriously enough. We are experts in our own field. We must not only be consulted, but also involved in the whole decision-making process.

Looking at the current state of the outcome document, we, as young people, are really concerned by the issue of reproductive and sexual health. Every year, there is a 10 per cent increase in the number of HIV-infected people. That means five infections every second, and half of the newly infected are children. Roughly 10 per cent of all births in the world are attributed to adolescents. Every year, 14 million adolescent girls become mothers, while 130 million women have been circumcised, with an additional 2 million girls and women undergoing the procedure every year.

Young people themselves already acknowledge these problems and want to fight them. Now it is time for Governments to open their eyes. Governments cannot deny that young people are having sex. Governments committed themselves in Cairo to making reproductive and sexual health services accessible to all children and young people, without discrimination. They must provide honest information, health services and contraceptives. The subject of sexuality must be discussed in the open, without prejudice. Services and information are a right, not a favour. Young people themselves must be involved in this process from an early age. As I said, we are experts in our own field; adults must use our expertise. A good way to spread information on reproductive health and services is through young people themselves, by peer education.

To conclude, our participation here is only the beginning. Young people are equal partners, and together with adults, parents, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and Governments they should take action and say "yes for children".

Ms. Herfkens (Netherlands): I say "yes for children". The protection, but also the empowerment, of children and adolescents needs our constant attention and our commitment. This special session shows the special responsibility the international community feels for an age group that often bears the

brunt of human suffering in the present but that also carries hope for the future.

Since our 1990 Summit, great progress has been made. We have formulated crucial commitments, — at Cairo, Beijing and within the International Labour Organization. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has become the most successful human rights treaty in history. Development partners, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund, have helped to halve child deaths from diarrhoea. More babies are being breastfed than ever. Iodized salt has prevented brain damage among 90 million new-born children. Millions of children's lives have been saved because they were immunized in time, and more children than ever are going to school. Recently, at the recent meeting of the World Bank Development Committee, a great boost was given to the Education for All initiative following the Education for All conference I was privileged to host in Amsterdam.

In addition, we undertook the solemn commitment of the Millennium Summit development goals, the attainment of which would really have a major impact on children's lives. But we have to work to live up to the commitments we made. There is one thing that we teach our children: that a deal is a deal; that promises have to be kept. As every educator knows, what really matters is not what we say but how we ourselves actually act. As far as living up to commitments is concerned, I feel that the process of this session is embarrassing to us adults. Why did we renegotiate agreements of recent years? Is the United Nations not the place to build international consensus, instead of building a house of cards that can be destroyed as soon as the spotlight of international attention fades away? Why is a deal not a deal? We risk wasting time and resources; but, frankly, we also risk wasting trust, and that is a vital resource that does not come in ample supply.

A look at the latest figures on the implementation of the Millennium Development goals reveals that we are in serious trouble, as we may not reach those goals. We have no time to lose and no resources to waste. We must recommit ourselves to the agreements, including those reached at Cairo, Beijing and Monterrey. We should get back to work and actually implement them.

The Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development forged a partnership, a breakthrough after decades of North-South dialogue: a partnership for actually achieving the Millennium development goals. That can help make the Doha round the true development round that we want it to be. It can help the World Summit on Sustainable Development be a success. Through mutual undertakings we will have to make donor countries live up to the long-established standard of dedicating 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to official development assistance in accordance with the specific time frames we agreed at Monterrey. We agree that no low-income country with a credible poverty-reduction strategy should fail just because of the lack of external resources. Developing countries, in turn, are increasingly putting their own houses in order and are taking responsibility for the quality of their policies, their governance and the functioning of their institutions.

These commitments we made have a huge impact children's lives. We should not forget those commitments and we should not forget the Millennium Summit development goals we are reaffirming here as we head to Johannesburg. And we should not forget Monterrey. This all became very clear to me, and really struck me, when I organized a meeting with kids in the Netherlands where I taught them what the Millennium Summit development goals were about and explained to them that the most important among them was halving the number of poor people living on less than $1 per day by the year 2015. A little girl stood up at that meeting and asked me, "Why are you waiting until 2015?" I had a very hard time explaining that. The only thing that I want us to commit ourselves to, on top of what we have already committed ourselves to do, is indeed that that little girl will discover in 2015 that we did live up to the deals we made and that we did make the Millennium Summit development goals happen.

For that to happen we do not need more summits, more talks and more commitments in speeches and on paper. We need action and implementation. That implies hard work and lots of cash. The Assembly can rest assured that it can count on us, the Netherlands.

The Acting President: I call now on His Excellency The Honourable Steve Maharey, Minister for Social Services and Employment of New Zealand.

Mr. Maharey (New Zealand): It is an honour to represent New Zealand here today. I am particularly proud to be accompanied by New Zealand's two young delegates — Te Kerei Moka and Jessica Dewan. This is

a unique global gathering. With child representatives from almost every country in the world participating in this special session, we have the unique opportunity to hear first-hand the voices of the future leaders and shapers of our societies. They have shared with us their hopes and aspirations, and it is now incumbent upon us to match their commitment with a strong plan of action to truly achieve a world fit for children.

Around the world, children experience suffering that no child should have to face — hunger, abuse, exploitation, discrimination and violence. Of course, many children will never reach adulthood. In all of our countries more needs to be done to protect children, to ensure the enjoyment of their human rights and to build a firm platform for living healthy, happy lives.

In New Zealand's report to the United Nations on progress since the 1990 World Summit for Children, we described measures to promote the rights and well being of children in our country. I want to mention a few of those here today. We are giving young people a chance to have direct input into policy making. In New Zealand, thousands of children were actively involved in developing both the agenda for children and the youth development strategy, which set out the Government's policies with regard to children and young people. We have established an annual children's day to celebrate children and to demonstrate to how much we value them.

New Zealand's Commissioner for Children is attending this forum. The Commissioner, as an advocate for children, has worked extensively to promote awareness and understanding of children's issues and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Recognizing the vulnerability of children, we are committed to eliminating family violence. New Zealand's family violence prevention strategy paves the way towards our goal of families living free from violence. Strengthening communities and the voluntary sector is an important element of this strategy. The plan of action for a world fit for children focuses on three key areas: promoting healthy lives, providing quality education and protecting children. A world fit for children requires that we act in the best interests of the child.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child must be at the heart of all our efforts. As the most universally ratified human rights treaty in history, it is the fundamental framework for all actions concerning children. But we must strive harder to implement it, with the aid of the platform of action to be adopted by this special session.

In our action plan, New Zealand has highlighted the special position of indigenous children. We have emphasized the need to pay particular attention to the promotion and the protection of their rights, especially in the fields of education and health. That reflects New Zealand's dedication to the reduction of inequalities between the Maori, as indigenous people, and the Pakeha, as *tauiwi*, or later arrivals.

We appreciate the emphasis in the special session's draft action plan on the need to protect children from exploitation and abuse. In that respect, New Zealand has responded wholeheartedly to the development of additional levels of international law to protect children. New Zealand has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and also International Labour Organization Convention 182, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. We are also working towards ratification of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and of the new protocol to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime that aims to prevent and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

New Zealand endorses the emphasis on the health and education of children in the special session's draft action plan. Access to education and basic health services are fundamental ingredients needed to enable children to live full and meaningful lives. In our view, that should also include access to appropriate reproductive health services and information.

When we go back to our parliaments, offices, boardrooms, communities, homes, playgrounds and schools, we must sustain our commitment to achieving the goals that brought us together and on which we are united. I reaffirm the commitment of New Zealand to working to create a world fit for all children. By equipping and empowering our children to face the challenges of the future, we act not only in the best interests of the child, but also in the best interests of all humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Herbert Haupt, Federal Minister for Social Security and Generations of Austria.

Mr. Haupt (Austria): A decade has passed since delegations from all States represented in the United Nations gathered for the first World Summit for Children. At that summit conference, for the first time, the concerns of the children of the world were the focus of international attention.

Since then, many significant developments have taken place, owing to a large extent to the remarkable — and perhaps somewhat unexpected — success of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A great deal has changed in the international community, including in Austria, and children have become an independent human rights issue, in terms of their place both within and outside the family. Every child has a comprehensive right to protection and care from the family, from caregivers and from social institutions.

There is no doubt that because of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is acknowledged today that children have the same personal dignity as adults and that they have specific rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child declares in its preamble that the family is "the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children".

In that connection, it must certainly be of concern to us that many countries have been unable to break the link between children, family and poverty. It is a well-known fact that economic poverty often provides fertile soil for the manifestation of social poverty. To break that vicious circle, every society needs to ensure that it provides an adequate legal and social framework for children and their families. For a family to fulfil its comprehensive obligations towards children in the best possible way, society at large must also contribute its share.

Austria has accorded the highest priority to the fight against poverty among families and children. The Austrian system of family transfer payments, in conjunction with special tax legislation, ensures that a considerable share of the average cost of raising a child today is borne by the State. Contributions include family allowances and contributions in kind, such as free school textbooks, public transportation and so on. Moreover, tax incentives are provided.

In order to make it as easy as possible for both parents to care for their infant in a spirit of partnership, Austria recently passed the Home Child Care Allowance Act. Under that law, parental child care is explicitly recognized as a service rendered to society and remuneration is provided in keeping with family policies. Today, every parent — regardless of whether that parent was gainfully employed before the birth of his or her child — is entitled to a child care allowance. In order to combat further the impoverishment of families with small children, socially disadvantaged parents and single parents receive a monthly benefit in addition to that payment.

An important measure of relief and support for parents who already have or are expecting a baby with disabilities is that of supplementary care benefits, which are granted as of the date of birth. The present Government has introduced such benefits as an incentive for parents to opt to bring an unborn disabled child to term and to help them bear the burden on a lifelong basis.

Occasionally, mothers in despair abandon their babies after giving birth. Such abandoned babies are in danger of dying before being found. Therefore, an increasing number of hospitals in Austria now provide a facility where babies can be delivered with full medical care. Furthermore, any mother may choose to give birth at such a facility without disclosing her identity. The present Government has also considerably facilitated the adoption of newborn or abandoned babies and small children.

In view of the high divorce rate in many countries — and Austria is no exception — the support of children affected by divorce is a major challenge facing the State and society today, as divorce causes many children to lose a parent. In 2001, Austria reformed the legislative framework regulating the parent-child relationship and established custodial rights for both parents after a divorce or separation. This measure aims at emphasizing even more strongly that both parents bear responsibility for their children.

Another new measure introduced in Austria to help divorcing parents reach a consensual solution is mediation. In that process — critical for them but even more so for their children — parents are encouraged to avail themselves of the help of an impartial third party in the form of a team of legally and psychologically trained mediators. The mediators support the parents in their efforts to shape their new family relationship in the best interests of the children. In order to help children — as well as parents — affected by divorce to cope with separation and its related problems, State-

supported child protection organizations offer a range of services.

In our modern societies, one would like to believe that violence against children as an educational measure is very much a thing of the past. However, non-violent education has been enshrined in laws in only a few countries. Austria has introduced a ban on corporal punishment, which prohibits any physical or emotional abuse of children to enforce educational objectives. Furthermore, education of parents aims at fostering non-violent parenting skills and at imparting methods and models of non-violent education. Educational counselling, social services and child protection centres are additional instruments for helping families. In cases of domestic violence or threats of violence, the police are now entitled to remove the violent person from the family residence and to prohibit him or her from returning for a certain period of time.

We all must assume our responsibility to ensure that technological progress in the information sector is beneficial to our children. Each and every individual in our society should have the freedom of using modern technologies in a safe way, and the younger the person, the more so. That is why Austria focuses constant attention on newly emerging phenomena of commercial sexual exploitation of children through electronic devices. Such phenomena require careful monitoring and need to be adequately addressed in penal legislation. The overarching conclusions of the Vienna international conference on Combating Child Pornography on the Internet, organized by Austria within the framework of the European Union-United States transatlantic dialogue, remain valid.

In that context, I am pleased to announce that just one week ago, on 30 April, the Austrian Government took the formal decision to initiate in the Austrian Parliament the ratification process of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Let me draw attention to the issue of children in armed conflict. It is a fact that the steady increase in civilian casualties in conflict situations has an alarming impact on children. On 1 February of this year, Austria ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It is my conviction that the international community must undertake stronger efforts to address the complex needs of war-affected children. In that regard, I would like to pay special tribute to the United Nations, and in particular to the United Nations Children's Fund and to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, for their work to ensure greater protection of children affected by armed conflict.

During its chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2000, Austria initiated policies and measures to benefit children in conflict situations and to fight child trafficking. The issue of the protection of children in armed conflict will be one of the top priorities of the Human Security Network during the Austrian OSCE chairmanship in 2003.

We should take seriously the message of the Children's Forum that children are the future but are also the present. We should not put them off with a promise that some day their rights will be realized and their specific needs and interests met. We must, inter alia, ensure that children can take part in the decision-making process.

In this connection, I would like to point out that it was on account of an Austrian initiative that the Youth European Council of Ministers adopted a European Union resolution on youth participation. The resolution enhanced the scope of the participation of young people in socio-political decision-making, at both the European Union and member State levels.

With the establishment in Austria of a Federal Youth Union, young people now have a formal, legally recognized forum in which to voice their interests in a representative, credible and effective manner. The Union acts as a consulting body for the Federal Minister of Social Security and Generations and the Austrian Federal Government in general. It enjoys a comprehensive right to make proposals on matters relevant to young people and is involved in the scrutiny of bills related to children and young people.

The experiences we undergo and the lessons we learn during childhood shape our entire lives. We who are gathered here today, representatives of our countries and of the people living in them, carry the responsibility for the children and the young people who will shape the future of our nations.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Raashida Yoosuf, Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Security of Maldives.

Ms. Yoosuf (Maldives): It is indeed a great privilege for me to address this important gathering. More than a decade ago, we gathered here and pledged to give every child a better future. United in the same hope and prompted by the same resolve, we are here today to review the achievements in the implementation of the goals of the World Summit for Children and to renew our commitment. Inspired by the positive results in a number of areas and encouraged by the undiminished enthusiasm of the international community, we should pursue with greater vigour our efforts to construct a world fit for children. I recognize the elaborate preparations that have been made to ensure the success of this special session of the General Assembly.

My Government's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a milestone in the history of child protection in the Maldives. Although we have never had gross violations of child rights in the Maldives, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has brought to our attention issues that need to be systematically addressed if the rights of all children are to be realized. In fact, it has provided us with a yardstick against which our progress can be measured.

Since 1990, we have made considerable progress in implementing the Convention. The year 1991 was declared the Year of the Maldivian Child. The same year, a national Plan of Action was drawn up to achieve the goals related to children in the 1990s, and a law on the protection of the rights of children was passed. A National Council for the Protection of the Rights of Children was established as an advisory body with respect to identifying and addressing issues detrimental to the survival, protection and development of children. In 1992, a special Unit for the Rights of Children was created to ensure child rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was translated into Dhivehi, the national language, and disseminated throughout the country. Campaigns have been conducted to change attitudes and practices that hamper the promotion and protection of child rights. Furthermore, the groundwork for establishing a national child protection system has been laid, and a prototype is in place for a pilot study of the project.

The Government of the Maldives recognizes that children's health, education and welfare are central to the development of the nation. In the area of health, the Government gives special attention to preventive health, particularly to that of children. We have been able to eradicate diseases such as malaria and polio. The infant mortality rate has been reduced from 120 per 1,000 in 1977 to 20 per 1,000 now. Child immunization coverage has become universal. The goal of health for all by 2005 is the aim of our national health master plan.

In the education sector, too, we have achieved remarkable progress. Access to primary education has been universalized. By 2020, we aspire to make 10 years of formal schooling the minimum educational standard for the children of the Maldives. We are also making concerted efforts to promote home- and community-based early childhood care and development.

Maldivian society has always cherished its young people. Whether they come in conflict with the law or are made vulnerable by difficult circumstances, they have never been ignored by society. Community-based rehabilitation has been our tradition. Now, the rehabilitation efforts have been fortified by national policies, legislation and the creation of monitoring agencies. Developments in that area include the establishment of a juvenile court and a child protection unit within the police.

In the past two decades, the Government of Maldives has been attaching particular importance to empowering women as prime actors in the development of the country and in ensuring the best interests of children. As a result, the situation of the girl child and of women has improved significantly. Strong measures have been adopted to reduce maternal mortality, promote safe motherhood and advance women's health and well-being.

Some of the major challenges before my country today include its harsh geography, diseconomies of scale due to the scattered nature of the population, strains on the family unit due to the erosion of the traditional culture, the high incidence of divorce, and rapid urbanization. In addition, the break-up of families adversely affects the social and psychological development, as well as the well-being, of children and women.

Despite such challenges, we have success stories to tell and positive trends to report in the area of protecting child rights. In our quest for a better future, we have proclaimed a national "Vision 2020" programme through which we envisage to educate every child, provide environments that foster self-confidence and self-esteem, cater to the needs of children with disabilities, and prevent all forms of child abuse. Furthermore, our sixth National Development Plan reinforces this vision by planning to review existing laws and to strengthen enforcement measures.

Preparations are under way for establishing appropriate legal and judicial frameworks for dealing with children's issues. By the same token, we have begun to assess the situation of children to identify and target services for vulnerable groups. The creation of an institutional mechanism for providing alternative family care is under way. The emerging issue of adolescent health and well-being will be addressed as a priority in the coming years.

We in the Maldives believe that investing in children and generating opportunities for them is the only way to ensure a healthier, wealthier and happier future for our country. To that end, we are encouraging greater initiative and participation by private-sector and civil society actors. We believe also that working in partnership with the international community is equally important in carrying forward our agenda for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. Therefore, we are happy to be part of the Global Movement for Children, which is indeed a model for partnership and participation. It is my hope that the Movement will get stronger and serve as a powerful force in shaping a better future for the world's children.

The Maldives is proud of these achievements. We are aware of the magnitude of the challenges that lie ahead of us. Yet we are determined to pursue the goals of the World Summit for Children, relying on greater donor assistance and on stronger international cooperation. We are equally determined to preserve our achievements and to safeguard them from any erosion.

Before I conclude, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks to our donors and to the United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for their continuous support in our efforts to attain the goals of the World Summit for Children. I strongly believe that, through both national commitments and international obligations, we will have the strength and the resources to realize the new global vision for children that we are here to promise and proclaim.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that just yesterday the Cabinet recommended the ratification of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. I am confident that the ratification of these two Optional Protocols will no doubt further our efforts to protect the rights of our children.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia): At the outset, let me welcome all of the participants in this high-level forum and convey a word of special appreciation from Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, who was among the active participants in the first World Summit for Children in 1990. He had planned to join our meeting, but the recent powerful earthquake in Tbilisi, the capital of my country, has, unfortunately, prevented him from coming.

Twelve years ago, at a historic time, when the world community of nations was already preparing to welcome a new millennium and was establishing a post-cold-war world architecture, a document expressing a global determination was adopted in this very Hall.

This determination has been reflected in the sustained efforts of many actors, in particular those of the United Nations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to translate into reality the idea of a world fit for children. Therefore, I should like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General and to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Bellamy, as well as to all our partners. We also deeply appreciate the contribution made by UNICEF headquarters, including its regional and country offices.

Here I would like to quote President Shevardnadze, who, addressing that high-level forum from this very rostrum 12 years ago, expressed his conviction that

"no one can ever again deprive the Members of our common House of the right to smile, to love, to study, and, finally, to live".

Those words reflected the mood of the era. Today, one question seems very topical: have our hopes been fulfilled, and to what extent have we paid our debt to the small citizens of our planet?

Unfortunately, with the end of the cold war, the spread of a "new kind of thinking" has been hampered. The conflicts of a new era, aggressive separatism and ethnic cleansing in many regions of the world, including Abkhazia, Georgia, have brought tears and hardship to hundreds of thousands of children, who still suffer terrible injustice and uncertainty.

As during the previous century, indifference remains the foremost enemy and sin of mankind. How can the world community accept the fact that the separatist regime in Abkhazia denies children the right to study in their own tongue and to use books written in Georgian? As long as there is even one child refugee left, the world community should feel indebted to the younger generation.

Nor has the great city of New York escaped a destructive wave of violence and hatred. The tragic developments of 11 September made it clear that the "world fit for children" to which we all aspire calls for an unconditional commitment on the part of every nation. We must tolerate neither international terrorism nor the sources that fuel it.

The process of globalization creates new opportunities, along with new challenges. This increases the vulnerability of those parts of the world that are experiencing the difficult process of democratic transformation and of a transition to a market economy. Children in such countries suffer most from the difficulties of transitional processes and need our understanding and support.

In circumstances in which national resources, as well as international aid, are limited, the role of the private sector may well be a decisive one. When it comes to children's problems, this role has to become more meaningful.

In today's world, the diversity of challenges relating to children has acquired dangerous proportions. In this respect, health and good basic education are key factors in a child's development. These issues are topical, particularly for newly independent States, which, in the process of building their statehood, lack adequate resources to fill the gap created in these fields.

In this regard, we attach great importance to the deployment of modern information and communication technologies in the educational system of our countries. Educated and employed persons represent the driving forces of a country's sustainable development.

Today, I would also like to emphasize the significance of respecting the participation rights of children. In this respect, we have some national experience in Georgia. On the initiative of UNICEF and under the high patronage of our President, the Children and Youth Parliament of Georgia has been elected. This institution is a place where children can express the views of their peers, bringing their concerns to the attention of the authorities and suggesting specific actions.

I believe that the time has come to shift our focus to a result-oriented, realistic and flexible plan of action with a real financial basis, in which the countries with economies in transition would take their proper place.

To conclude, let me express the hope that this forum will represent an important phase in the Global Movement for Children. Our paramount goal is to leave to posterity a planet that will live up to man's moral and intellectual aspirations. I strongly believe that the generation that arose after the collapse of the totalitarian wall that divided nations will live in such a world.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Aichatou Foumakoye, Minister of Social Development and Child Protection of the Niger.

Mrs. Foumakoye (Niger) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the President of the Republic of the Niger, Mamadou Tandja, to reiterate our gratitude to Mr. Han Seung-soo for the professionalism and seriousness with which he has led the work of the special session of the General Assembly. We also thank the other members of the Bureau and Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the heads of State and Government of United Nations Member States met to consider the alarming situation of children throughout the world in order to develop agreed, appropriate and necessary

solutions. Indeed, while the Convention on the Rights of the Child consolidated the three generations of human rights, it still required specific and quantifiable objectives. To that end, the objectives set by the 1990 Summit flowed not only from that need, but also and above all from the will of heads of State and Government to make a steadfast commitment to alleviating the suffering of children and to guarantee them a better world.

Today, as we see in the excellent end-decade report of the Secretary-General, the situation of children in most developing countries has not improved significantly, in spite of the many efforts made. The proof is that, since 1990, and despite the economic difficulties we face in our countries, Niger devotes an average of 29 per cent of its operating expenses to social sectors and that rate has been above 35 per cent since 1999. That may explain why the few advances made by Niger in this field have come precisely in the education of young girls, whose net rate of school attendance rose from 13 per cent in 1992 to 25 per cent in 2000, and in health care, where the rate of vaccination for some childhood diseases has clearly increased.

We owe these highly encouraging results not only to the financial commitment of the State, its development partners and innovative door-to-door vaccination strategies, but also to the positive involvement of traditional chiefs. These leaders of opinion, the guardians of our traditional values and adjuncts to local Government, have committed themselves to promoting the rights of the child in the Niger.

The State of the Niger, a participant in the 1990 Summit — the main axiom of which was "Putting children first" — has displayed all the resolve required by the importance and sensitivity of this question by drafting and implementing policies, programmes and plans in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 27 objectives of the World Summit for Children.

Despite all this, in the year 2000, according to a number of indicators, 280 out of every 1,000 children die before the age of five, while 40 out of 100 suffer malnutrition; only 43 per cent of the population have access to clean water; only one third of school-age children attend school; and only 20 per cent of adults are literate. Moreover, poverty, which is both the cause and effect of all this, has become widespread and reached disturbing proportions, given that 63 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and 34 per cent live in extreme poverty. This poverty affects the most vulnerable sectors of society: women and children. Thus, in this context, where everything becomes a priority, it would appear difficult to attain the 27 objectives of the World Summit for Children.

This special session strives to confirm the commitments undertaken in 1990. Niger, through me, fully subscribes to those commitments. The session does provide an opportunity, however, to take a critical look at the shortcomings that have prevented us from reaching the 1990 objectives and to make a determined commitment to improving on the past.

With respect to the specific case of the Niger, and without denying our responsibilities, I must point out that my country has had a particularly difficult decade, characterized by social and political instability exacerbated by an economic crisis that has systematically thwarted the efforts of the State to implement the objectives of the World Summit for Children.

Drawing on the lessons it has learned, the Government of the Fifth Republic has undertaken some measures to improve the living conditions of people in general and of children in particular. For instance, it has developed some five-year and/or ten-year programmes, including the recent poverty reduction strategy. Each of these programmes has improved on the past by defining quantifiable objectives that we are scrupulously committed to achieving.

In addition, the special programme of President Mamadou Tandja — which each year includes, in addition to the current programme, the building of 1,000 classrooms, 1,000 health units, 100 mini-dams and the socio-economic integration of 1,000 young people, soon to include domestic assistance and micro-credit for rural women — has set the tone for our national commitment. Thus, interventions will henceforth and always be better targeted towards a more rational use of available resources.

The progress made to date could have been greater had the international community offered more substantial support, particularly in combating malaria, the primary cause of child mortality in Niger, poverty and HIV/AIDS.

In this regard, I appeal to all of Niger's development partners to maintain and step up their support in order to allow us to meet the commitments we will undertake here on behalf of children in the coming decade.

I cannot conclude without expressing Niger's support for the African common position adopted at the Pan-African Forum in Cairo, in which we played an active role. The children of Africa — victims of poverty, disease and war — also aspire to a world fit for children.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Highness Princess Lalla Meryem, Chairperson of the delegation of Morocco.

Princess Meryem (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the great pleasure to convey to representatives here the greetings of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco, who honoured me with the duty of reading out on his behalf the following royal statement, which His Majesty — given the particular interest and care that he attaches to this question — should have liked to deliver personally to the General Assembly at its special session on children.

> "In addressing the General Assembly, I recall with sadness the odious terrorist attacks against the friendly United States of America. These tragic events caused the temporary postponement of the General Assembly's special session on children. However, the convening of this session to consider the situation of children throughout the world symbolizes the triumph of hope over despair and points to the supremacy of vision and constructive will over all forms of obscurantism and self-serving arrogance.
>
> "Our meeting today is intended to both evaluate the efforts that the international community has made with regard to the rights of children and to identify the obstacles and the collective endeavours to overcome them, so that a better future can be secured for children. However, in our view such challenges cannot be met successfully without the concerted efforts of Governments, international organizations and institutions, the private sector and civil society.
>
> "In the context of the international efforts to promote children's rights, it should be recalled that the Kingdom of Morocco has spared no effort to fulfil the objectives set forth at the World Summit for Children and the commitments undertaken by my great father, His Majesty King Hassan II, who, on 3 February 1992, signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and who established in 1995 the National Observatory for Children's Rights, entrusting its chairmanship to my dear sister, Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem, so that she might closely monitor all issues pertaining to the promotion of the status of children in Morocco.
>
> "My country has made major progress in this field, as reflected in its report, submitted to the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in early 2001, on compliance with the objectives set forth at the World Summit for Children. Although the road ahead is long, Morocco's will to achieve our goals remains firm.
>
> "In contributing to the preparatory process for this special session, the Kingdom of Morocco, in coordination with UNICEF, organized a series of international forums, including the Arab Civil Society Forum, the African First Ladies' Summit, the Arab-African Conference of Finance Ministers and the regional Forum against Sexual Exploitation of Children. These meetings proved that decisions and recommendations can be reflected in progress on the ground and have a positive effect only if we give a human dimension to the globalization process in order to prevent the exacerbation of the current international economic and social imbalances. This can be achieved only through the rational use of available resources, the promotion of South-South cooperation and purposeful international cooperation, especially in the light of commitments undertaken at the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development, where leaders pledged to devote a substantial part of their resources to financing development by 2006.
>
> "We are therefore hopeful that the level of official development assistance will be commensurate with the ambitions of developing countries so that they can achieve the objectives set by the United Nations. In this regard, we must bear in mind that the heavy burden of external

debt is a major stumbling block in the way of sound and sustainable development.

"There is no doubt that we must make greater efforts to protect the rights of children working in extremely dismal conditions. I also deplore the suffering of children in the difficult circumstances created by the imposition of sanctions and armed conflicts, such as in Palestine and Iraq, where their basic right to life is at risk. The international community must shoulder its responsibility to find appropriate solutions for ending this tragedy.

"In addition to the involvement of children in armed conflict, their exploitation for commercial purposes is one of our principal and special concerns. Sectoral bodies of the Commission on Human Rights have accorded particular attention to these two problems in recent years. Today, we must adopt necessary measures to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and, as decision-makers, must develop strategies, policies and programmes focused primarily on children within the framework of preventive measures to fight AIDS and to oppose the involvement of children in armed conflict. These are disturbing problems and it is the duty of the international community to make greater efforts to find appropriate solutions.

"The Kingdom of Morocco pledges to enforce the provisions of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the Summit and to make them national priorities in order to maintain peace and security in the interests of current and future generations."

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Mary Note, First Lady and Chairperson of the delegation of the Marshall Islands.

Ms. Note (Marshall Islands): It is a great honour to address this important United Nations special session on children. I bring the Assembly greetings from His Excellency President Kessai Note and from the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

I join those who have spoken before me in thanking Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the capable staff of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for their warm welcome and for the excellent arrangements made for this important special session. We offer our congratulations to the President on his astute leadership in guiding the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly. We have every confidence that, under his able leadership, this session will be most meaningful and productive.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands, being a Member of this pre-eminent global Organization, has taken positive steps in pursuit of the goals set forth in the 1990 Declaration and Plan of Action for Children. In May 1991, our Government established the National Nutrition and Children's Council, and it ratified the international Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. That Convention is therefore part of our laws and is regarded as complementary to the rights and freedoms guaranteed to all Marshallese, including children, by our Constitution.

As a small island developing State, the Republic of the Marshall Islands is grappling with its share of developmental challenges to provide a better future for our children and youth, who make up more than 50 per cent of our total population of 60,000 people. Our educational system has undergone many developmental changes to be more in line with global trends, and to ensure that every Marshallese child has an opportunity to go to school — whether it be primary, secondary or tertiary school. Our Government is committed to provide every Marshallese child with the highest quality education possible to enable them to be productive members of whichever society they may choose for themselves. Similarly, our health system has already taken initial steps to place more emphasis on health as a shared responsibility involving communities and grassroots participation in primary and preventive health care.

Our Parliament is currently deliberating legislation that will strengthen the rights of our children and further give effect to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, we have established a focal point office for children in our Government, with a mandate to coordinate and monitor all issues relating to children and to ensure that the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are implemented at all levels of the Government.

The Marshall Islands commends, with humble appreciation, the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the 1990 Declaration and Plan of Action for Children (A/S-27/3). It is most gratifying to learn that great strides have been made in achieving the

goals of the 1990 Declaration. However, a lot remains to be done; we shall not be complacent.

The Secretary-General's report indicates that children are the most vulnerable and helpless members of our global community. Millions of children have lost their lives to preventable diseases and hunger. Many do not have a chance to start with, while others suffer gruelling pain and misery. Millions more are deprived of the most basic human necessities to ensure their survival, while many others lack the necessary support, compassion and love that every precious God-given child should have. Millions of children are going to bed hungry right now as we speak.

I am confident that, in our hearts, we would all wish to see our children grow up in a peaceful world where every child is loved, nurtured and protected — a world where children of all nations and diverse cultural backgrounds coexist peacefully and where the institutions of humanity, both public and otherwise, serve to enhance the potential of every child to reach his or her full potential as God created it.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is committed to supporting all United Nations initiatives designed to effectively improve the living conditions of all children the world over. Let us challenge ourselves this day to bring about a new world of hope and opportunity for our children. Let us work together to build a better world for our children. Let us today promise a better tomorrow for the precious children of every nation, every family and every generation.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vinci Clodumar, Chairman of the delegation of Nauru.

Mr. Clodumar (Nauru): I have the honour and privilege to deliver this statement on behalf of the 15 countries of the Pacific Islands Forum that are Members of the United Nations. This is a historic event, and we welcome the participation of children at this special session. We are extremely pleased to note that children from our region are participating in the Children's Forum and in delegations to the special session.

We recognize with deep appreciation the work done by Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which acted as the secretariat to the Preparatory Committee, and the staff of the United Nations Secretariat for their tenacious commitment, all of which has resulted in the action-oriented draft outcome document entitled "A world fit for children".

The link between the outcome document and the development goals of the Millennium Summit is clear. The outcome of the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development sets out the ways and means for financing development strategies and targets in the Millennium Summit development goals. As a significant social summit, this special session is being held in a timely fashion for its outcomes to be incorporated into the work of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The principles and strategies for shaping the future of children elaborated in the Beijing Declaration on Commitments for Children in the East Asia and Pacific Region for 2001-2010, which has been included in document A/S-27/13, are our guide for addressing the challenges and tasks for our region over the next decade. To a great extent, those principles and strategies are mirrored in the plan of action of the draft outcome document before us. Accordingly, we endorse the principles and objectives in the draft political declaration and plan of action for a world fit for children, taking into account the specific circumstances of individual Member countries.

Most of the Pacific Islands Forum countries have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention is informing the gradual process of change towards development in the Pacific region. Traditionally, in Forum island countries our children learn from their elders and are brought up in the ways and customs of their communities. At a regional social development workshop held in February this year in Suva, Fiji, participants discussed the relevance of international conventions and the constraints on their implementation. Notwithstanding this, many Forum island countries are actively implementing the Convention. Most have coordinating committees for children, consisting of governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental agencies, including UNICEF. Progress is being constrained by a lack of both financial and human resources. The skills needed for reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other conventions are scarce.

We recognize the key role that is being played by non-governmental and civil-society organizations in helping Governments to implement the Convention. We agree that chronic poverty remains the single biggest obstacle to meeting children's needs and to protecting and promoting their rights. Poverty exists to a certain extent in the Pacific, and it is on the increase in many countries. Children bear the brunt of poverty. Poor families cannot afford basic needs such as adequate nutrition, education and health care. A cycle of poverty, replicated from one generation to the next, is becoming apparent, creating an underclass of disadvantaged people and exacerbating social and economic divisions.

We agree that access to health services is essential if children are to receive the appropriate care and protection to which they have a right. Pacific island countries have made much progress in reducing infant and maternal mortality rates in recent decades, but there is room for improvement. The Millennium Development goals set targets to which we can aspire. The major strategy to improve child health is the integrated management of childhood illness, which focuses on the total environment as well as on elements such as nutrition — especially breastfeeding — and immunization. Forum island countries are increasingly placing more emphasis on primary preventive health than on secondary curative health services.

The Healthy Islands framework that has been adopted by Pacific Ministers of Health takes a population-focused approach rather than a disease-focused approach, and it consolidates aspects of health care and social and economic well-being. According to the Yanuca Declaration,

> "healthy islands should be places where: children are nurtured in body and mind; environments invite learning and leisure; people work and age with dignity; and ecological balance is a source of pride".

Education indicators in our region are very good compared with those in other developing countries. Our member countries spend between 13 and 30 per cent of their total Government expenditures on education. Compulsory basic education with net enrolment ratios ranging from 88 to 100 per cent is a common reality. However, more resources and attention are needed to boost access to more resource-intensive sectors, such as early-childhood education, post-primary education for girls in some of the Forum island countries and education for the disabled.

The potential for using distance education and information communications technology offers exciting benefits. Our regional university, the University of the South Pacific, has been a forerunner in this area, but it needs continued support to sustain its work.

To address the issue of education quality in the Forum island countries, the Education Ministers of the region met in 2001. The outcome of their meeting was the Basic Education Action Plan, which is currently in the project design phase. An urgent concern across the region is how to meet the needs and aspirations of upcoming generations. Many school dropouts find that they have inadequate or inappropriate skills for the few salaried jobs that are available, for agricultural work or for other types of livelihoods. The lack of opportunity in our Pacific region has been termed a "poverty of opportunity".

Domestic violence is prevalent in many parts of the Pacific, and that affects children's welfare. There is a growing recognition that such violence is unacceptable and that it cannot be justified as customary. Non-governmental organizations have taken the lead role in providing support services to victims of domestic violence.

Other issues facing young people include high rates of youth suicide in some Forum island countries; alcohol, tobacco and other forms of substance abuse; and sexual and physical abuse. The secretariat of the Pacific Community conducts a number of programmes for young people in the region that provide information, training and support and life skills reinforcement.

Pacific populations have a high proportion of young people, who have particular health needs. Reproductive health is a sensitive subject in Pacific cultures, and it is rarely addressed in a family context. Typically, young people are poorly informed about reproductive health. High rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases exist. While HIV/AIDS is not yet widespread, the region is vulnerable to it. There is a regional HIV/AIDS strategy, and individual countries have responded to the pandemic with their respective strategic plans of action.

It is obvious that, in the Pacific Islands Forum region, there are programmes in place in the health and education sectors that address some of the needs of children. More needs to be done to improve the coordination and cohesion of programmes that cut across sectors. We are confident that the relatively low profile of the Pacific in UNICEF's overall funding landscape stands to be improved and better strategized in the light of the evaluation exercise that UNICEF has just completed. That, we hope, will assist member countries in our region to pursue holistic and child-centred national development goals in the near future.

We stand ready to play our part in the implementation of the 21 proposed goals of the draft plan of action, and we will do whatever is necessary to improve the coordination of regional efforts and to enhance linkages with the United Nations system, with other regional bodies, with international organizations and with non-governmental organizations to attain a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Iris Falcam, Chairperson of the delegation of the Federated States of Micronesia.

Ms. Falcam (Federated States of Micronesia): It is a great pleasure and a special honour for me to be here today at this special session of the General Assembly, particularly as it relates to humankind's most precious resource: our children.

I should like to recognize Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, and its five-member Bureau, the Secretary-General and his staff, and Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, for their hard work in organizing this important session.

This meeting offers a vital opportunity to review the progress we have made since we first set goals at the World Summit for Children a decade ago. The fact that so many countries are represented here today confirms the universal recognition of the importance of our children. As parents and as leaders of nations, it is our awesome task to ensure that we leave behind a world that is fit for our children. Whether we be from large countries or small countries — like my own — the responsibility is the same.

My country is a small island developing nation in the Western Pacific. Roughly half of our current population of 107,000 is under the age of 20. The immediate future of our nation rests upon our youth. The measure of our success as a people as we seek to climb the development ladder during the next several decades will be determined by the quality of life that we offer to our children here and now.

In the past decade, the Federated States of Micronesia has made significant progress towards that end. We have successfully eliminated polio and neonatal tetanus. There were no deaths related to measles in 2000. Both infant and maternal mortality rates have been drastically reduced during this period. There have been significant improvements in levels of accessibility to safe water and sanitation. Still, there is much more work to be done in the areas of education and literacy, among others.

While Micronesia, fortunately, does not experience some of the scourges that affect the well-being of children in other parts of the world, we are nevertheless very apprehensive about the potential effects of climate change and the resultant rise in sea level on the future of our children. That phenomenon threatens the very existence of their homes, culture and history. It may result in the introduction of contagious diseases that have not been present in Micronesia. One such disease, malaria, is reported to have spread outside its endemic boundary in the South-West Pacific. We urge the United Nations to continue to monitor the rise in sea level and its implications, and to facilitate assistance for preventive measures.

The Internet and related technologies could be a tool of access for our children to achieve better health care, education and a better understanding of the world beyond our borders. However, the question in Micronesia is still whether we can afford to build the necessary infrastructure to bring the Internet and other telecommunications services to our children, who in many cases are living in remote villages and islands without electricity. My country appreciates the generous financial contribution that Japan has pledged to narrow the digital divide and hopes that other Member States will make similar contributions. We look forward to continuing our work with the international community as we address those emerging challenges. Further, we must ensure that the Internet and other new technologies do not provide additional avenues for exploitation. In that regard, I am pleased to announce that my country has recently signed the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the Federated States of Micronesia, as in other developing countries, easing the plight of our children is tied to broader poverty reduction measures. While we have made great strides towards improving the well-being of our children, we cannot help but think how much more could be done if we just had the resources. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of the international community that my country has received through the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and other agencies of the United Nations system. We also extend our sincere appreciation to States Members of the United Nations which have extended bilateral assistance. We hope that those partners will continue to work with us to make Micronesia a better place for its children.

We, as leaders, cannot do this alone. We will need the active cooperation of all stakeholders, including youth. We should take concrete steps to ensure that the voices of our children are adequately heard on issues that will determine their future.

I cannot help but recall the scene in the Global Movement for Children video, in which a little boy points to Nelson Mandela and exclaims, "You were once us. Give us the chance to be you." Or little Audrey Chenynut and Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, who yesterday proclaimed, "We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources needed to solve them" (see A/S-27/PV.1). They are the solution. Let us all promise them and the many other children around the world that we will assist them in fulfilling those wishes for a better future.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our shock and sadness at the tragic events that transpired on 11 September 2001 here in the United States. We denounce those acts of cowardice, which threaten the principles of freedom and liberty across the globe. The families and children whose lives were changed by those events have our sympathy and heartfelt best wishes.

On behalf of the President of the Federated States of Micronesia, I wish to express our appreciation for the opportunity to appear before the Assembly today, to work to review our progress and to revisit our goals for the future.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergei Ling, Chairman of the Delegation of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Ling (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me, on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Belarus, to welcome the participants in one of this year's most remarkable events, the special session of the General Assembly on children, organized for the sake of children, for the sake of the future of each and every nation and, ultimately, for the sake of humanity.

Today, we have gathered to conduct a truly comprehensive analysis of progress in the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Children, to enable ourselves not just to exchange the positive national experiences we have gained during the 12 years since the Summit but also to admit the fact that in today's world one of every three children continues to suffer from poverty, that one of every 12 children dies before the age of 5 and that millions suffer from exploitation and have no access to education. Those children are expecting of us concrete actions to make this world liveable for them.

Our country has not been able to escape the problems faced by children all over the world. They include the loss of parents, child abuse, juvenile delinquency, parental neglect, the spread of HIV/AIDS and drug abuse among adolescents.

In Belarus, preparations for the special session on children were priorities for the Government, national and local authorities and non-governmental organizations. The Government approved a plan of action to prepare for the special session and issued a national report on the progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Children. Belarus has an established practice of preparing and publishing annual national reports on the status of children. The holding of national children's forums and of meetings between local authorities and leaders of children's organizations have become customary.

The Republic of Belarus has adopted the Law on the Rights of the Child, which constitutes a legislative basis f[illegible]e establishment of social and legal mechanisms to protect children's rights. No fewer than 27 legislative and normative acts on children have been adopted, improving national legislation in this area. The National Commission on the Rights of the Child has become a central national and public organ for the

coordination of national policies on children. A special programme, the Children of Belarus, was established by presidential decree. Belarus has also adopted a new marriage code, and a system for targeted social protection is being established.

A number of public events were organized on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since 2000, every Belarusian at the age of 16, receives a national passport with a copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights attached. New books on the rights of the child have been published for schools and the general public. Belarus is establishing a network of information centres on the rights of the child, and a nationwide campaign for the promotion of those rights was recently launched. The text of that session's final document, "A World Fit for Children", was published in the Belarusian press.

Over the past two years Belarus has become a party to the International Labour Organization's Convention 182, on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Belarus signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Preparations are under way for Belarus to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

It has been 16 years since the catastrophe at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Yet the consequences of that tragedy continue to affect the health of children in Belarus. More than 400,000 children under the age of 16 continue to be affected by Chernobyl, including nearly 40,000 under the age of 14. Those children are the object of special care and concern on the part of the Government, as well as on the part of the international community.

We express our appreciation to the United Nations Children's Fund as a major organizer of this session, and to its regional offices, which are doing a tremendous job at the field level.

A number of projects in Belarus are being implemented, with the assistance of UNICEF, in areas that include prevention of diseases caused by iodine deficiency, combat against HIV/AIDS, establishment of orphanages, adoption of abandoned children, juvenile justice and so on.

We are convinced that many of the problems facing children can be resolved through concerted international efforts. We add our voice to those that are calling for the building of a world fit for children, and we affirm the determination of the Republic of Belarus to engage in international cooperation aimed at achieving tangible success for this generous cause.

The Acting President: I call on Mr. Emile Jarjou'i, Chairman of the observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Jarjou'i (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address this special session on children on behalf of President Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian people, and especially our children. This session is being convened more than a decade after the holding of the World Summit for Children to consider the state of the world's children and to renew and intensify commitments aimed at improving their future well-being in all areas of life.

As we review the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on children, it is evident that many of the world's children continue to be denied many of the rights that are guaranteed by these important international instruments.

Palestinian children do not enjoy many of those rights. Their lives are marked by the systematic denial and violation by Israel, the occupying Power, of their most basic rights, precluding the true enjoyment of rights to which other children of the world are, and should be, entitled. Palestinian children are the only children of the world without a State of their own. They live as refugees or under foreign occupation, or both. These realities are cause for deep regret, but they must also be cause for urgent action and involvement. Palestinian children have learned that the existence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on children is important, but only if those instruments are implemented.

As adults, we may try to rationalize what is happening and make general statements to the effect that political efforts are under way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. But children are not interested in politics. They want to live, play, go to school, travel and explore their world. But they cannot.

In the last 19 months, Israeli military forces, acting upon the directives of their Government, have indiscriminately killed hundreds of Palestinian children. Those children were killed by the Israeli military forces while they lay asleep in their beds, in the arms of their mothers, or while playing or going to school.

The killing of those children is inexcusable. They are not mere numbers that news broadcasters mention at the end of the day. They are our children and we will not forget them. These deaths represent a gross violation of their most basic right — the right to life. Numerous violations have taken place. Palestinian children and their families have suffered from the tremendous physical destruction caused by the Israeli onslaught. This includes the destruction of their homes, schools, playgrounds, libraries, roads, holy sites and vital facilities.

Their suffering has been particularly acute in the past month, following the continued escalation of the Israeli siege and the assaults on Palestinian cities, refugee camps and villages. Those areas have been devastated. The invasions and closures have led to the complete socio-economic suffocation of the Palestinian people. Over 60 per cent of our children now live in poverty. Hundreds of Palestinian children are still being illegally detained in Israeli prisons, and tens of thousands of Palestinian children have had their education disrupted. This has resulted in a dire humanitarian situation, in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been denied normal access to the basic necessities of life, such as food, water and medical care. Thousands of children have been rendered homeless. This is the state in which Palestinian children find themselves today.

Although we still do not exercise sovereignty over our land, this has not prevented us — the Palestinian National Authority — from endorsing the Convention on the Rights of the Child or from giving high priority to implementing the measures laid out in the Convention. That commitment has been effectively translated into reality through the creation of specialized institutions such as the Palestinian High Council for Childhood and Motherhood, and the Secretariat of the National Plan of Action for Palestinian Children, which comprises the ministries of health, education, social affairs, youth and sports, culture, information, labour and public institutions. These entities — with the help of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and of donor countries — have developed specific programmes to meet the needs of children through preventive health care and medicine, education, social welfare and assistance, psychological health, summer camps and a host of other rights-based, child-friendly national programmes to benefit children's well-being.

A draft Palestinian Child's Rights Charter has been prepared that incorporates the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and that is now before the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics is actively collecting data and information in order effectively to produce a database and a monitoring system for children. Unfortunately, these efforts have been hampered by Israel's continuing military incursions into the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. This should come as no surprise to those familiar with the needs and rights of children. Progress is not really feasible or sustainable when children live in situations of war, occupation or poverty.

As we meet over the next few days, let us all remember that good intentions are not enough in and of themselves. Palestinian children, like children the world over, have the right to life, development, an identity, freedom of speech and movement, education and protection — I repeat, protection. We must translate our good intentions into good deeds. That is the path to peace. Our children have a right to be safe and to have their rights realized. As such, we request that the following necessary measures and actions be taken.

First, paragraphs 7 (7) and 41 of the draft outcome document of this special session, which specifically address the protection of children from war, must be implemented. This is an urgent issue for Palestinian children and for the international community at large.

Secondly, we demand that Palestinian children be provided with a normal life, free from foreign occupation, destruction and fear, in their own State.

Thirdly, we demand that Israel respect and implement the relevant provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Fourthly, we demand that urgent international action be taken to protect Palestinian children now, and that immediate and safe access to health and educational services for Palestinian children be provided, including social and psychosocial services.

Fifthly, we demand that donor countries provide sufficient funds giving priority to directly supporting the well-being of Palestinian children and their families.

In conclusion, we appeal to the international community at this very important special session to shoulder its responsibility to end the suffering and the tragedy of Palestinian children. Let us all work together to ensure that we meet this challenge.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Ms. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of the World Health Organization.

Ms. Brundtland (World Health Organization): A child is born and begins her journey through life. Her parents live on less than $2 per day. Like other children in the poor half of our world, there is a one in five risk that she will have died before she is 5. She, and millions of others, have no choice. They march into life like soldiers into killing fields, with almost 11 million dead each year, many more than the numbers who have died from wars during the past decade. We must break the silence. The deaths of poor children are not inevitable. They should not be happening; they are a blot on our conscience.

Heads of State, ministers and senior officials made great commitments to change the world at the World Summit for Children, in 1990. So, are we delivering?

Child mortality in many countries around the world has fallen. We have shown the impact of combating polio and of immunizing children against other childhood diseases. We have seen the effectiveness of oral rehydration and basic hygiene in saving lives. But the progress over the past decade is nowhere nearly good enough. We do not reach the children who are most in need. We are failing those children because we do not transform our knowledge into action that reaches them. We must now do much more to bring that knowledge and those services to people. We cannot expect them to come to us in search of them.

At the Global Consultation on Child and Adolescent Health and Development, held in Stockholm in March, we set out the strategies needed for a new initiative for child health. At the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development, later that month, we saw a global commitment to support the Millennium Summit development goals and to provide additional financial resources to achieve them. We now have the tools and the pledges, but that it is not enough. We need to focus more on the most vulnerable children, newborns. Many conditions that result in a newborn dying can easily be prevented or treated. We need a combined approach to the mother and her baby during pregnancy, to have someone with knowledge and skills with her during childbirth and effective care for both mother and child after birth. That does not call for sophisticated and expensive technology. It means having functioning health facilities that can handle complications in the first weeks of life and during the delivery and post-partum period. A newborn needs a healthy mother.

We need to focus more on the 1.2 billion children — one fifth of the global population — who are teenagers. They have survived childhood and are rapidly becoming adults. This is when patterns of behaviour take root and when lifestyle choices are made, choices that will affect their chances for a long and healthy life. Tobacco, diet and alcohol choices made in these years have massive implications. At least two thirds of premature adult deaths result from behaviours developed at this time.

HIV/AIDS is essentially a disease of children and young people. The majority of those who are newly infected with HIV are less than 24 years of age. Infection rates are increasing. As I have been speaking 15 young people have been infected with HIV, five every minute. We can confront this pandemic and turn it back. To succeed, we need to focus on the realities of teenage lives rather than on our views about how young people should live. This applies when we are working with teenagers to reduce pregnancy rates, HIV infection rates and the incidence of unsafe sex. They may need help. We cannot shy away from talking about it. It means providing adult support to young people as they handle the thoughts, feelings and experiences that come with growing up. Helping them acquire skills for developing relationships and dealing with sexuality provides a foundation for responsible adulthood. It

helps promote good health and contributes to a healthy environment for the next generation of young children.

We can point to powerful progress in child health during the last decade, alliances within which the different parties forget their differences and pursue agreed goals using common strategies. But we must now scale up our actions. We must work harder to reach and empower poor people and their children, especially their newborn babies and those who are in their teens. Only then can we truly say that we are preparing our world for the generations of the future; only then will we be seen to be confronting inequity and promoting social justice; only then will we create the foundation for lasting peace.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Mr. James T. Morris, Executive Director of the World Food Programme.

Mr. Morris (World Food Programme): First, may I pay my respects and express my gratitude to Kofi Annan, Carol Bellamy and Patricia Durrant for their inspired leadership.

The World Food Programme's mission is to fight hunger and to provide food for the hungry, wherever and whenever they are in need. A hungry child has very little chance in this world, especially very little opportunity to learn. What would you say to a hungry child? How would you justify hunger? Could it be done? Those questions have troubled me for a long time, but much more since I became Executive Director of the World Food Programme, two months ago. There are 300 million children whose lives are scarred by hunger, more than the entire population of the United States. These children deserve an explanation from us. Why is it that some days they have food and others they do not? Why is it that they feel so tired and that they are sick so often? Why is it that they do not grow like other children?

Like all here, I have been struggling to find some answers. Maybe an economist could sit down with a hungry child and offer a good explanation. The issue is, in fact, very complicated, and differs from place to place. But if I had to give a simple and honest answer to a hungry little boy or girl in Ethiopia, I would say: "We, all of us, have not done enough to help you; we have failed you — that is why you are hungry."

There is no single solution to the hunger of a malnourished child in Korea, southern Sudan or Angola. We need long-term investments in agriculture, a stronger global trading system and new types of crops. But my concern and the concern of the World Food Programme are the children who are hungry today.

What can be done? For starters, we must use food aid to help hungry children right now. We cannot wait for economic development to reach those children and change their lives. That sounds simple enough, but last year, the World Food Programme fed only 42 million children. There are many millions of children that we did not reach. We must do more. That is why the World Food Programme is aggressively promoting the global school feeding programme and a greater focus on nutrition for pregnant women and their youngest children.

For the modest sum of 19 United States cents, 22 euro cents or 25 yen a day, the World Food Programme can provide a meal in school that both helps end childhood hunger and promotes education. Through school feeding we have seen enrolments literally double and the number of girls attending school rise sharply.

There is no comparable opportunity available in the world to make such a dramatic difference in the life of a child, especially in his or her early years. The leverage, the return on this human investment, is powerful. Getting girls into school is especially critical. Illiterate girls get married as early as 11 years of age and may have up to seven children before they reach age 18. In contrast, girls who go to school marry later, space births and have half as many children.

Basic education is the best investment we can make to improve the conditions of the poor. A study of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization showed that in countries with an adult literacy rate of about 40 per cent, the gross national product per capita averaged just $210 annually. Those places with an 80 per cent level of literacy, the gross national product was five times as much, $1,000.

In particular, I would draw attention, and especially that of the G-8 delegations, to our initiative with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Together with the leadership of NEPAD, we are working to help bring 40 million young Africans into primary school. In-school meals and take-home rations could enable most of those children — otherwise destined for illiteracy and poverty — to

benefit from a primary education. We are calling on the G-8 — and, in fact, all donors — to help us reach that goal by 2015. The initial annual investment required will be about $300 million in 2003 and will gradually be increased to $2 billion in 2015.

The *Los Angeles Times* ran an editorial two weeks ago on hunger.

> "A Reuters reporter recently asked a Guatemalan farmer, Luisa Vásquez, how many children she had. She replied, 'Three dead and four living.' What killed the three? The answer could be seen in the telltale swollen belly of the toddler clinging to her leg: easily preventable illness brought on by malnutrition."

No strategy to promote development will ever succeed if we ignore people like Luisa Vásquez. Hunger is inherited in families like Luisa's.

Feeding programmes for women and children are among our top priorities. We have to reach them at critical points in their lives or the scourge of hunger will pass from one generation to the next. Last year, the World Food Programme provided food in 46 countries to over one million pregnant and lactating mothers, 700,000 infants in therapeutic feeding programmes and 3 million children in supplementary feeding programmes.

At Monterrey, the major donors announced substantial increases in funds for development. I ask each and every donor: Will you help us feed children? Will you help us get them into school? Will you help us see that poor mothers are well nourished and do not pass their hunger on to yet another generation? Let us be partners — partners in standing up for hungry children, partners in seeing that the young are educated. I ask donors please to use their reservoir of political goodwill to move issues in support of hope and opportunity for children to the top of the world's agenda.

I am reminded of a beautiful saying of Mother Theresa: "We can do no great things, only small things with great love". It is a small thing to feed a hungry child — a small thing we can do together.

The meeting rose at 2.10 p.m.